Sociology of Agriculture and Food

The International Journal of Sociology of Agriculture and Food

Volume 30 | Issue 1 | April 2024

Journal of the Research Committee on the Sociology of Agriculture and Food (RC40) of the International Sociological Association (ISA)

ISSN 0798-1759 (print) | 2524-1982 (online)

The International Journal of Sociology of Agriculture and Food

Aims and Scope:
The International Journal of Sociology of Agriculture and Food (IJSAF) provides a forum for informed academic social science debates about food and agriculture-related issues. While the journal is owned by the Research Committee of Agriculture and Food of the International Sociological Association, the journal welcomes and encourages contributions based on any social science perspective. Furthermore, it welcomes interdisciplinary approaches to the study of the social, cultural, political and environmental aspects of food production, consumption and agricultural change. Finally, the journal actively reaches out to scholars from all over the globe.

The International Journal of Sociology of Agriculture and Food

Volume 30, Issue 1, April 2024

Contents

From coalitions to social movements: Lessons from civic food coalition formation in Australia 1-17
Camille Freeman and Kiah Smith

Local food systems and community development: a symbiotic relation? 19-42
Hege Westkog, Mette Talseth Solnørdal, Mikkel Vindegg, Anders Tønnesen, Thea Sandnes, Bård Sødal Grasbekk, Ingrid Christensen

THE FOOD SYSTEM IN THE (POST-)PANDEMIC WORLD

Rethinking Agrifood Systems in (Post-)Pandemic Times: Moving Beyond Crisis and Recovery Narratives 43-52
Atakan Büke, José Duarte Ribeiro, Hilde Bjørkhaug, and Sarah Ruth Sippel

Blame Covid-19 and Ignore the Long History of Industrial Standardisation in Agriculture: Supermarket and GLOBALG.A.P. Standards, Exploitation of Migrant/Refugee Farmworkers, and Marginalisation of Small-Scale Farmers in Turkey 53-73
Yildiz Atasoy

Exceptional policies for exceptional situations? How COVID-19 revealed persisting precarity for seasonal migrant workers 75-93
Hilde Bjørkhaug and Jostein Brobakk

The State of Indigenous Foods in Africa: The case of Mankon Community in the Northwest Region of Cameroon 95-110
Sheila Ngoh Manka and Mokong Simon Mapadimeng

Grassroots food initatives at the rural-urban interface: Potential and constraints in Ankara 111-126
Esra Demirkol Colosio and Valerio Colosio

What is left after the pandemic? Solidarity and Reciprocity amongst Kayambi agroecological producers during COVID-19 127-146
Larissa da Silva Araujo

EMERGING SCHOLARS OF AGRICULTURE AND FOOD 147

Advancing early-career agri-food researchers publishing opportunities in Sub Saharan Africa 149-154
Fridah Mbuchi-Kut, Allison Loconto and Sheila Ngoh Manka

The challenges and contexts of the Lokaleng School Feeding Scheme in the North West Province, South Africa 155-174
Bongi Bianca Mkhombo, Sheila Ngoh Manka and Kiran Odhav

Food Movements Unite! ? Food sovereignty, the agrarian question, and the contours of organising from below in the South African food system 175-193
Andrew Bennie

The International Journal of Sociology of Agriculture and Food

Open Access Statement:
IJSAF is a fully open access journal published using Open Journal Systems as part of the Public Knowledge Project.

There are no fees for publishing articles or for accessing them. All articles are available on the internet to all users immediately upon publications. Non-commercial and commercial use and distribution are permitted, on the condition that the author and the journal are properly acknowledged.

Peer Review Policy:
All articles published in this journal have undergone internal editorial scrutiny and external, double-blind peer review.

Publication Ethics:
The International Journal of Sociology of Agriculture and Food subscribes to the principles of the Committee on Publication Ethics. Their international standards for responsible research publication for editors and authors are summarized below.

International Standards for Editors:

1. Editors are accountable and should take responsibility for everything they publish.
2. Editors should make fair and unbiased decisions independent from commercial consideration and ensure a fair and appropriate peer review process.
3. Editors should adopt editorial policies that encourage maximum transparency and complete, honest reporting.
4. Editors should guard the integrity of the published record by issuing corrections and retractions when needed and pursuing suspected or alleged research and publication misconduct.
5. Editors should pursue reviewer and editorial misconduct.
6. Editors should critically assess the ethical conduct of studies in humans and animals.
7. Peer reviewers and authors should be told what is expected of them.
8. Editors should have appropriate policies in place for handling editorial conflicts of interest.

International Standards for Authors:

1. The research being reported should have been conducted in an ethical and responsible manner and should comply with all relevant legislation.
2. Researchers should present their results clearly, honestly, and without fabrication, falsification or inappropriate data manipulation.
3. Researchers should strive to describe their methods clearly and unambiguously so that their findings can be confirmed by others.
4. Researchers should adhere to publication requirements that submitted work is original, is not plagiarised, and has not been published elsewhere.
5. Authors should take collective responsibility for submitted and published work.
6. The authorship of research publications should accurately reflect individuals' contributions to the work and its reporting.
7. Funding sources and relevant conflicts of interest should be disclosed.

E. Wager and S. Kleinert (2011) Responsible research publication: international standards for authors. A position statement developed at the 2nd World Conference on Research Integrity, Singapore, July 22-24, 2010, in: T. Mayer and N. Steneck (eds) *Promoting Research Integrity in a Global Environment. Singapore: World Scientific Publishing,* pp. 309–316.

Abstracting and Indexing Information: *AgEcon Search, Agricola (USDA), CAB Abstracts, SocINDEX (EBSCO), Scopus, SCImago*

The journal articles are included in the LOCKSS archival system.

From coalitions to social movements: Lessons from civic food coalition formation in Australia

Paper first received: 10 May 2023; Accepted: 11 February 2024; Published in final form: 07 April 2024
http://doi.org/10.48416/ijsaf.v30i1.528

Camille FREEMAN[1] and Kiah SMITH[2]

Abstract

Despite the abundant literature on the need for grassroots food system reform, the process for achieving such reform is less understood from the perspective of multi-scalar coalition building. Using semi-structured interviews with civic food coalition leaders in Australia, our paper examines the strengths and struggles associated with collectivising, collaborating, and planning that civic food coalitions experience as they aim to drive wider transformations in food systems. Findings indicate a need to pay heightened attention during the early stages of coalition formation, as this is when coalitions form a sustainable structure as they begin to scale up. In addition to gaining a better understanding of these internal dynamics, we argue that civic food coalitions can be one pathway to transform the food system, as they serve as an important catalyst to bring food-related issues (such as social and environmental justice) to the forefront in building alliances and collective action across communities.

[1] School of Social Science, The University of Queensland, Australia
[2] Centre for Policy Futures, The University of Queensland, Australia

Corresponding author: Camille Freeman, camille.freeman@uq.edu.au

Biographical notes

Camille Freeman is a PhD Candidate at the School of Social Science, The University of Queensland. Her PhD focuses on local and alternative food systems, Covid-19, and ethical and sustainable consumption.

Dr Kiah Smith is a DECRA Senior Research Fellow in Sociology at the Centre for Policy Futures, The University of Queensland. Her research in food systems focuses on food justice and security, financialization, resilience, sustainable livelihoods and gender.

ISSN: 0798-1759 | This Journal is double blind refereed.

Introduction

Coalitions are a necessary contribution to any social movement for systemic change (McCammon and Van Dyke, 2010), including urgent efforts to progress towards more sustainable, healthy and equitable food systems (Blay-Palmer et al., 2016; Moragues-Faus, 2017; FAO, 2020). Through this lens, transformation is understood as the ability to shift from existing and dominant systems onto new and innovative pathways (Folke et al., 2010), emphasising how change occurs. Coalitions emerge when distinct activist groups mutually agree to work together towards a shared goal, in recognition that change requires expanding the power of individuals, organisations, networks and alliances through collective action (McCammon and Van Dyke, 2010; Shawki and Schnyder, 2021). Specifically, civic food coalitions are said to (a) involve a range of civic food actors, practices, innovations, and discourses working together (Pereira et al., 2020; Schiff and Levkoe, 2014), and thus (b) can facilitate greater civic engagement, transparency and participation in food politics (MacRae and Donahue, 2013). They are also often situated at the nexus of environmental, social and economic justice efforts, as local communities increasingly recognise (and mobilise around) food-related policy agendas connecting access to healthy food with reducing CO2 emissions, addressing food waste, and respecting ecological boundaries (Canal Viera et al., 2019; Mattioni, 2021). In this sense, coalition building is an important element within wider social/environmental movement mobilisation, as it provides opportunities to maximise the power of collective joint action at different scales (Diani and McAdam, 2003). In Australia, a growing number of civic food coalitions, initiatives, networks, alliances and broader social movement actors (that together constitute 'civic food networks', or CFNs) are rapidly organising in order to find new pathways away from the dominant industrial agri-food system (Canal Vieira et al., 2019; Smith, 2023). While arguments to change the current industrialised food system have been widely studied, the challenges and opportunities associated with expanding civic food coalitions – as a key pathway to mobilising such change – have not been extensively reviewed.

Through qualitative research with leaders of selected Australian food coalitions, we explore these dynamics by examining the conditions and processes that enable civic food coalitions to scale up their transformative potential, or on the contrary that impede their efforts to do so. Specifically, we ask: *What conditions and/or processes occur when civic food coalitions form and develop? What strategies have Australian food coalitions followed as they aim to scale up their impact and produce change? What is the connection between coalition building and growing a wider food movement?*

We argue that experiences at the stage of coalition formation – such as establishing a formally-agreed governance structure, assigning leadership roles, and defining clear goals – determine the level of success coalitions achieve in enhancing the power of individuals and groups through collective action. This provides a better understanding of how political, economic and social dynamics challenge complex food systems (Marsden and Morley, 2014), and complements research that grounds understandings of strategic scaling-up in the experiences of food movement leaders (see Hoey and Sponseller, 2018; Shawki and Hunter, 2022). It also contributes to the growing body of research that explores the transformative capacity of CFNs for sustainability more generally (Lohest et al., 2019; Zoll et al., 2021).

Our paper is structured as follows. We start with a review of the literature on Australian food coalitions, as well as that which highlights the central role of coalitions in catalysing collective action across multiple scales. We then turn to Community Coalition Action Theory (CCAT, from the field of community development), as a theoretical framework to better understand how community place-based coalitions are formed, maintained and institutionalised, thus linking coalitions with the conditions required for effecting wider social change. Next, we describe the methodology based on interview research with leaders of civic food coalitions in Australia. This draws on a subset of qualitative data from a nation-wide participatory study of civil society, food justice and sustainability transformations in Australia, entitled Fair Food Futures. Findings are organised along three themes related to the formation of place-based civic food activism through coalitions: (a) operations and processes, (b) leadership and staffing, and (c) formalising structures. In line with our overall aim to

understand the conditions, processes and strategies associated with scaling up, these findings demonstrate that strong foundations are essential in the early stages of coalition formation, as this is where group cohesion, shared purpose and functionality are established and sustained. From this, the stability for alliance-building can grow, and movements are more likely to strengthen over time. The paper concludes with reflection on the conditions required to support civic food coalitions in implementing solutions to food system inequalities, thus reinforcing the importance of shared values and representation. This focus reflects international interest in environmental and social movement politics and contributes to the emerging body of Australian research investigating civic coalitions' potential to create transition pathways towards more sustainable and inclusive food systems.

Food politics in Australia

In Australia, there is growing interest in diverse CFNs that support locally grown produce, community-supported agriculture, animal rights and welfare, urban agroecology, sustainable diets, and food literacy. This movement has grown geographically and politically in the last two decades, largely due to concerns heightened by the 2008 global financial crisis (which raised the cost of basic foods), increased concentration of major food retailers, and the aftermath of floods and droughts that periodically affect food supply chains, leading to rising domestic food insecurity (Burton et al., 2013; Smith et al., 2016). Additionally, the sustainability of food systems faces many challenges on matters such as soil degradation, depletion of land and water resources, and loss of biodiversity (HLPE, 2019). These problems have emphasised a growing need to revive urban food production and promote community support for an alternative food system in Australia and elsewhere (Larder et al., 2014; Lyons et al., 2013; Thornton, 2017). Covid-19 has further entrenched CFNs as important contributors to building more resilient and just food systems (Nemes et al., 2021), in line with the wider literature calling for increased support for local level, civil society initiatives (Mattioni, 2021). The formation of civic food coalitions has been an important (yet under-researched) topic, which our paper specifically aims to address.

The Australian food movement consists of a variety of networks and alliances across public and civic sectors. The number of CFNs in Australia is increasing, and although there is currently no national database that counts them, estimates range from around 500 'fair food' initiatives nationally (Smith, 2019), to 400+ individual initiatives in Sydney alone (Williams and Tait, 2023). When organised into national-level coalitions – such as the Australian Food Sovereignty Alliance (AFSA), Right to Food Coalition, New Economies Network Australia (NENA), Open Food Network, Young Farmers' Connect, Sustainable Table, and SUSTAIN – they increasingly play a recognisable role in the food advocacy space, with growing presence in the Australian political landscape. While their motivations, visions and goals differ, as do their operational scale and outcomes, they generally align around action-focused agendas to: (i) localise food production and consumption (mainly through the growth of urban agriculture and consumer education); (ii) shift towards more ecologically sustainable and resilient farming models (such as agroecology or regenerative agriculture); (iii) build cooperative food distribution and financing models; (iv) address food access, affordability and health outcomes; and (v) enhance sociocultural inclusion and rights (through food justice, food sovereignty or right to food discourses) (Smith, 2023). As is often the case in other places (such as Canada – see example in Sumner, 2018), Australian CFNs can increasingly be found operating in alliance with groups working across the climate, health and nutrition, energy, peace and education spheres.

Coalitions thus have an important function in developing policies for sustainable and just food systems, despite their limited formal influence over food governance in Australia to date (Carey et al., 2015; Carrad et al. 2022; Parker and Morgan, 2013). For instance, civil society coalitions played an important role in critiquing the development of the 2013 'National Food Plan' in Australia and the subsequent development of the 'People's Food Plan' (Sippel and Larder, 2019). The latter document was based on substantial grassroots consultation, providing a mostly cohesive (although contested) guiding 'vision' around which the Australian food movement could mobilise, it is currently being updated through similar participatory methods (AFSA, 2022). This affirmed

coalition building as an important strategy to challenge the dominant market-driven policy underpinning the government plan, solidified the AFSA as a key policy actor, and demonstrated the capacity for collective political action (Caraher et al., 2013). Similarly, the Right to Food Coalition is very active in policy debates around the right to food (which Australia does not legislate) as a response to rising rates of food insecurity and lack of adequate public policies around food access (Wood et al., 2018). In terms of environmentalism, civic food coalitions have long been influential in advocating for 'food systems' reforms and in food-climate politics in general (Mann, 2021; Schlosberg and Craven, 2019). Recent outcomes have been the inclusion of agriculture under the Australia New Zealand Food Standards code review in 2021 and the recognition of agroecology in the UN Global Biodiversity Framework in 2022.

Although Australian civic food coalitions are growing at the grassroots level, they do not have sufficient political influence to direct a sustainable food systems agenda in government and industry sectors (Lourival and Rose, 2020). Government food policy making remains highly fragmented, with few formal processes to engage civil society in decision making within a context of over-reliance on the food relief sector, significant power asymmetries, weak domestic food policies, and means-tested welfare policies that prioritise market solutions over civic ones (Dixon and Richards, 2016). Moreover, Australian food coalitions have tended to focus on specific food system issues, such as food security, health and nutrition, food waste, education, climate change or disaster relief (Carrad et al., 2022), with less focus on addressing structural barriers and inequalities around race, gender, and social class, which are more visible in American and Canadian food movements (Smith, 2023). This makes it difficult to engage with those who are food insecure and disenfranchises certain communities from playing a more active role in food system reforms (Moragues-Faus, 2017). Other obstacles noted in the literature include limited access to land for practical food justice initiatives (such as community gardens, composting hubs, community kitchens and food exchanges), low levels of public engagement, little funding, over-regulation and over-reliance on volunteer labour (Canal Vieira et al., 2019). While some of these Australian studies have sought to document the conditions that enable or impede the scaling up of individual food initiatives, none have expanded this to consider the factors that enable (or hinder) coalitions to cooperate for a larger collective impact on food politics. We turn now to the rich literature on coalitions and social movements to further justify our study's focus on coalition building.

Coalitions in relation to social movements

A vast literature argues that civil society is a necessary component for transformability because it encourages citizens to actively organise around food-related issues, with the potential to restructure food systems (Holt-Giménez and Shattuck, 2011; Renting et al., 2012). It has also been argued that coalitions are strong drivers of transformative change, as they establish innovative platforms for diverse public and private actors to organise around solutions to social-ecological issues that are simultaneously local and transnational (Andrée et al., 2019; Diani et al., 2010). Through community-based collectivising, sharing of resources and knowledge, and expanding social networks, coalitions create spaces for food initiatives to take on more ambitious outcomes while increasing public attention and visibility for their causes (Brooker and Meyer, 2019; Tarrow, 2005). It is not always clear, however, what role coalitions play in wider movement building, (or vice-versa), which raises questions about the extent to which coalitions can provide a pathway for societal and political change.

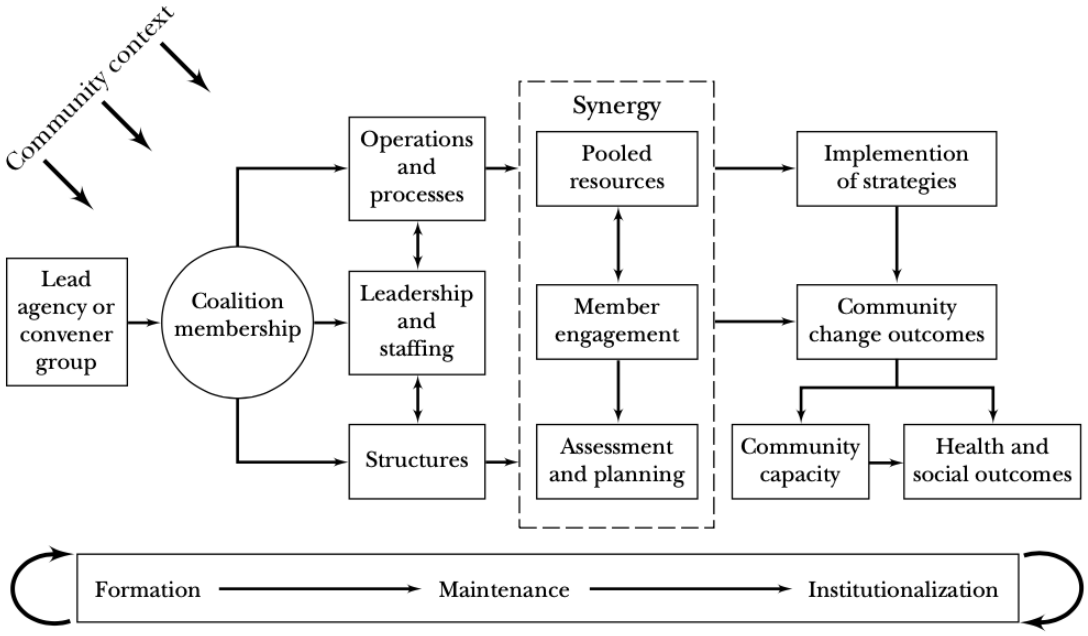
Social movements (SM) develop when people are collectively driven to create change in individual, political, and/or societal institutions and structures (Brooker and Meyer, 2019; Diani, 2003). Coalitions specifically emerge in a community when there is a need for previously- distinct individuals or groups to share, collectivise, and act upon a specific joint action (Butterfoss, 2007). The reasons for establishing coalitions can vary by cause, motivation, geography, recruitment, activities, organisational form; can be translocal and/or transnational in scale; and can be short-lived (event coalition) or longstanding (enduring coalition) (Levi and Murphy, 2006; Shawki and Schnyder, 2021). Coalitions are also seen as vital insofar as they are able to coordinate and gain mutual support for a specific action, or campaign, quicker than networks can since they are often driven by a specific target perceived as an urgent threat (Staggenborg, 2010). While the strongest example of a coalition

within agri-food studies has been the rise of La Vía Campesina and its relation to the food sovereignty movement (Martínez-Torres and Rosset, 2010; McMichael, 2008), the fact remains that the effectiveness of global movements is also tied to how well they can resonate with localised values and activities. For example, Sippel and Larder (2019) describe tensions in transferring food sovereignty from global South to settings in the global North, such as the mismatch between rural and urban constituent concerns. Smith (2018) highlights similar problems when 'zero hunger' discourse grew from a regional initiative to a global sustainability movement, including a 'watering down' of radical critiques. With limited existing research into Australian food coalitions, understanding the various stages that coalitions undergo in order to be considered significant for movement building is an area in need of additional attention.

The factors required for coalition formation have been well explored in the SM literature through the conditions that make coalitions possible. According to SM scholars, closely aligned ideologies, interests and core beliefs have been shown to be important for coalition formation, and for coordinated action to develop (McCammon and Van Dyke, 2010; Shawki and Schnyder, 2021). Success requires relations of solidarity and inclusion (Shawki and Hunter, 2022). Moreover, coalition work requires a great deal of collaboration, and core coalition members will often share some level of mutual understanding (Beamish and Luebbers, 2009). Studies thus highlight the importance of establishing safe and interactive spaces that encourage coalition actors to engage with one another despite difference or distance (Enriquez, 2014). Tattersall (2010) further proposes that a coalition's formation and potential success is best understood by three elements – a strong organisational relationship (i.e., structures such as decision-making), common concern (i.e., shared goals), and scale (i.e., power at different geographic points) – which in turn depend on its organisational strength and the choices that its actors make.

In relation to food systems, coalition research has largely focused on food policy coalitions or food councils (McCartan and Palermo, 2017; Schiff, 2007) but has not widely documented the process of building civic food coalitions. In the remainder of this paper, we seek to better understand coalition building by looking internally at the conditions and processes that occur when civic food coalitions form, and as they seek to scale up their impact and transformative potential in Australia. Specifically, we examine the experiences of Australian CFNs in coalition formation as denoted by Community Coalition Action Theory (CCAT) (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Community Coalition Action Theory Framework



Source: Adapted from Butterfoss and Kegler (2002: 163)

CCAT was developed within the field of community development by Butterfoss and Kegler (2002) to provide a theoretical framework for how community place-based coalitions are formed, maintained and institutionalised. It helps to explain how coalitions may improve their outcomes (Butterfoss and Kegler, 2002) and so represents a unique approach to linking coalitions with the conditions required for affecting wider social change. The three stages of coalition development begin with: (1) formation (linking together the core purpose, structure, and internal organisational functioning of a coalition); (2) maintenance (strengthening membership and engagement, and implementing strategies to achieve the coalition's objectives); and (3) institutionalisation (engaging/reinforcing/refining strategies and expanding social capital across sectors) (Butterfoss, 2007; Butterfoss and Kegler, 2002). For this study, CCAT provides the groundwork to understand the strengths, struggles, limitations, and advantages faced during coalition formation in particular (Table 1) – as this was the stage to which most of our empirical data directly relates. This methodology is described hereunder.

Table 1: Description of formation stage constructs in CCAT

Constructs	Characteristics and Objectives
Lead agency/convener group	Is able to respond to an opportunity; can help mobilise community members to form a coalition; assists in initiating recruitment; provides technical, financial, and/or material support (e.g., a meeting space); and provides network contacts.
Coalition membership	Is the composition of a coalition's core group of members (i.e., number of sectors and individual actors); and focuses on recruiting and representing a range of interest groups, agencies, organisations, and institutions across communities.
Coalition operations and processes	Is the ability to: have open communication channels with staff and members; foster a positive work environment and organisational climate; maintain good social cohesion, and manage staff and membership conflict; review benefits and costs; ensure continual participation in assessment, planning, and resources development; share decision-making processes; and develop positive relationships amongst members and staffs.
Leadership and staffing	Is the process of: establishing strong leadership that will improve coalition functioning and purpose; pooling resources, managing member engagement; reviewing and developing plans; defining staff roles; if possible, creating paid positions for staff with organisational skills to provide support and facilitate the collaborative processes for coalition functioning. If having paid staff is not possible, roles must be clearly stated, and leadership must be able to support staff members to ensure ongoing satisfaction and commitment.
Structure	Is the ability to formalize and define roles, rules, policies, guidelines, and procedures, which will increase the likelihood of effective assessments and planning.

Source: Adapted from Butterfoss (2007: 77–81) and Butterfoss and Kegler (2002: 164–167)

Methodology

CCAT was chosen as the conceptual framework that is most adequate for this project in identifying and categorising stages of coalition building. In providing a framework to guide grassroots coalitions across these phases (Butterfoss, 2007), CCAT has historically been applied in healthcare research to evaluate community-driven coalition collaboration and to identify areas for improvement (Ghaffari et al., 2023; Luque et al., 2011; Miller et al., 2017). However, very few studies have used CCAT to analyse the challenges coalition actors face across the three stages (Eggert et al., 2015; Kegler and Swan, 2011). It has only minimally been applied to the field of agri-food research, namely in evaluating food policy councils (McCartan and Palermo, 2016; Schiff, 2007), and not at all to environmental coalitions. Our research seeks to build on this potential, by applying

CCAT for the first time to Australian CFNs.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with six leaders of Australian CFNs about their experiences and involvement working with coalitions, as part of a larger national study of civil society and food justice movements in Australia. [1] This subset of interview data is of interest here because these leaders have influenced decades of coalition action across scales, and have extensive experience in forming and maintaining the handful of enduring national food coalitions that are most powerful within Australia's food movement today (such as AFSA, Right to Food Coalition, NENA, and SUSTAIN). Participants in our interviews had been involved with each of the civic coalitions listed in Table 2, as well as with numerous successful and unsuccessful efforts to establish and/or maintain lesser-known, smaller-scale coalitions. This paper zooms in on their experiences specifically relevant to coalition formation within civic food movements in Australia.

Table 2: Civic food coalitions connected with the research sample

Coalition	Background	Focus /activities
Australian Food Sovereignty Alliance (AFSA)	Formed in 2010 as a nation-wide, farmer-led civil society organisation focused on building and supporting democratic participation to create, manage, and choose their own food system. AFSA is a member of international social movement networks IPC, CSM/CFS, La Via Campesina, Slow Food, and URGENCI.	Advocates for Australian farmers rights, through policy proposals, to enable agroecology and regenerative farming practices to thrive in Australia. AFSA's mission is articulated formally in the People's Food Plan and First Peoples First strategy.
New Economy Network Australia (NENA)	Formed in 2017 as a national led network aiming to transform Australia's economic system to be ecological, fair, and just. NENA is also a member of international civic body RIPESS international.	Aims to create and sustain spaces that support knowledge sharing, peer support, and collaboration across all sectors of the economy. NENA has a set of 5 Foundational Principles to guide their work.
Right to Food Coalition	Formed in 2016 as a voluntary, nation-wide advocacy group made up of practitioners, health and community workers, and researchers focused on establishing and guaranteeing a right to food in Australia.	Advocates for public health policies that address food security, health and wellbeing, as well as educating the public on food-insecurity issues within Australia. Their mission was communicated formally in a 2016 position statement on the right to food.
SUSTAIN	Formed in 2009 as a national network focused on creating a sustainable and healthy food system, which was formally known as the Food Alliance (2009-2014).	Advocates for a food systems approach through policy initiatives, network building, and research.

Adapted from coalition websites: https://afsa.org.au; https://www.neweconomy.org.au; https://righttofood.org.au; https://sustain.org.au

Participants spoke to us in their individual capacity (not as spokespersons for specific coalitions), and were located in Brisbane (Turrbal and Jaggera Nations), Sydney (Gadigal of the Eora Nation), Melbourne (Wurundjeri and Bunurong Nations) and regional Victoria (Dja Dja Wurrung Nation) and New South Wales (Ngarigo Nation). Interviews were conducted between January and May 2020, interview lengths varied between 45 and 65 minutes, and all participants gave their informed consent. It is important to mention that as actors in the Australian food movement are well connected with one another, we have de-identified all names, sites

[1] Conducted from 2019-2023, this national study – Fair Food Futures - aimed to examine the visions, strengths and limitations of CFNs as they sought to address food access and sustainability, and to identify the factors shaping, enabling or constraining food system governance. In total, the study included over 120 civic food actors in interviews (n=45), case studies (n=4) and participatory workshops (6 events, 90 participants), drawn widely from grower organisations, alternative distributors, consumer cooperatives, health and education advocacy, social enterprises, food charities, academia, local government, and policy making across the country. This mixed methods approach enabled the co-construction of qualitative 'future scenarios' whereby civic food actors defined their own visions for more sustainable and just food governance, with the aim of making the values and practices of food justice more visible to policy making around food security and the UN Sustainable Development Goals. As not all of the project participants were specifically involved in coalition formation, this paper reports on a subset of findings only, based on interview data from the 6 participants with specific expertise on the topic of coalition building and transformative pathways. This yielded over 200 pages of qualitative data analysed here.

or institutions to maintain participant confidentiality (Flick, 2007). Although most of the interviews were conducted before the onset of Covid-19, the pandemic unfortunately prevented some key actors (who have also contributed to the development of Australia's food movement) from being interviewed. The final sample (n=6) is therefore not representative of all the coalitions or coalition leaders active in the Australian civic food space today. Despite the small sample size, the in-depth nature of the case study provides important new insights into both coalition building and scaling-up, and has generated a large amount of quality data with which to answer the questions set out within the scope of this paper.

The three stages in CCAT informed both the interview guide and the data analysis (Figure 1). Open-ended interview questions were divided into the three topics, in addition to asking about respondents' personal histories of food activism and advocacy (Merriam and Tisdell, 2015). Following Flick (2007), data were analysed thematically with open coding conducted using NVivo software, version 12. Codes were organised into major themes which were then reorganised according to CCAT stages of development. The resulting analysis revealed findings that most strongly aligned with the formation stage in CCAT (refer Table 1). In the next section, data excerpts from selected interviews are presented where they best demonstrate instances of agrement and/or divergence of coalition actors' experiences in coalition formation.

Findings

Findings from our study highlight the need to pay close attention during the early stages of coalition formation, as this is where a coalition's unity is established, which can in turn determine the likelihood of success when transitioning into later stages (Butterfoss and Kegler, 2002). They also reveal significant barriers to coalition development that predominately occur during the formation stage, and which the CFN leaders told us about. We found that effective coalition building tended to be dependent on (a) processes that support member cohesion, collaboration and trust, (b) leadership and staffing, and (c) structures that foster synergies and support shared missions and values. This supports our argument regarding the pivotal role of these elements in shaping the 'strategic capacity' of coalitions to build collective strength, as they do in other countries (Hoey and Sponseller, 2018; Shawki and Schnyder, 2021). These elements are also crucial for understanding the potential of coalitions in Australia to foster scalable food movements.

Coalition operations and processes

According to CCAT, operations and processes determine how a coalition conducts its daily activities. This includes decision-making, communicating, networking, and conflict management. Here, our participants identified tensions around establishing and maintaining member cohesion, which resulted in weaker unity, conflicts between members, and poor management and accountability over tasks. This was expressed at times with surprise, as in the following comment: 'We [the organisers] had no idea that some people would really get angry and jealous that they weren't in charge or something' [Interview 3]. Participants also acknowledged the issue of 'big personalities' or 'big egos'[Interview 5]. Others described how tensions arose because of certain members taking undue recognition for the collective work of other coalition actors. Such testimonies were consistent with the literature showing that positive internal relations are dependent on cohesion and trust between members (Butterfoss, 2007; Meyer and Corrigall-Brown, 2005).

As CCAT predicts, collaboration amongst coalition members requires a delicate balance. Even though coalition members have collectivised to accomplish specific goals, members may hold different ideological opinions and expect different political outcomes that can weaken synergy (Butterfoss, 2007). For example, participants described difficulties engaging with actors outside of the food movement, such as those in health, environment, and government sectors. While on the one hand this was largely due to multiple voices competing for recognition (and funding), it was also acknowledged that a lack of pre-existing relations with stakeholders outside of coalition communities made it harder for newly formed coalitions to partner quickly. As one interviewee explained: 'It's actually quite difficult to suddenly create them, if you like, without the trust

that's already been building up between those groups' [Interview 1]. Establishing trust is therefore a critical factor in determining if a coalition can sustain and manage conflict (Arnold, 2011). While shared ideology can assist with this, it is possible that these problems are also partly related to the degree to which actors were invested (Guenther, 2010; Levi and Murphy, 2006).

CCAT proposes that a coalition's internal processes depend on members' engagement with the mission and with one another. When membership was defined by a broad shared interest in recognising social, environmental and economic concerns within food systems, this led to more rapid expansion of the coalition. However, tensions between members holding differing ideological positions also potentially reduced the quality of collaboration and hindered the direction of the coalition's main goal, as McCammon and Moon also found (2015). Processes can be fractured by the inability to 'work together', which was a recurring theme amongst participants. This was captured in the statement, '[W]e're not always working together for the bigger picture goals as effectively as we might' [Interview 1]. This is problematic because, while informal and loosely structured coalitions can work, they can also foster weak collective and/or overlapping identities and interests, resulting in weaker collaboration (Guenther, 2010).

Although geographical distance does not necessarily result in lower rates of collaboration, it is also true that coalition formation requires space (physical or virtual) to sustain open dialogue and minimise internal conflict (Enriquez, 2014). The size of Australia and its 'tyranny of distance' [Interview 4] was widely viewed as a challenge for recruiting members, connecting and networking. Distance affected both urban and rural members, making communication channels difficult when people needed to meet, collaborate, and plan [Interview 2]. As participants noted, distance caused most conflict when coalitions needed to decide quickly on organisational issues, as physical separation hampered the desired participatory democratic approach to decision-making. In this context, forming and maintaining coalitions is constantly challenged by the need to collaborate across diverse actors and interests, who may also be separated geographically and ideologically from the spaces in which coalitions are initially emerging (Daphi et al., 2022; Gawerc, 2019). This provides some insight into why learning to operate across scales – as coalitions must – is an important starting point for successful trans-scalar movement building later on.

Leadership and staffing

Defined staffing positions and strong coalition leadership are crucial for facilitating activities aimed at pooling resources, maintaining or increasing member engagement, and developing effective plans and strategies (Schroering and Staggenborg, 2022). In our study, many participants acknowledged problems with over-reliance on volunteers and difficulties with staff having to manage multiple tasks with limited resources. Most participants expressed concern about retaining commitment and engagement, stressing how frequently members were overworked and underrepresented. One participant voiced this concern by saying, 'it's really difficult for an organisation where you don't have paid employees to be able to dedicate the amount of time that you need to work on more than one issue at a time' [Interview 2]. Another participant repeated this, while voicing the need for paid staff or a coordinator to 'try to help keep things in line' [Interview 4] (although they did not achieve this). Most coalitions reviewed here did not pay their staff and relied on the voluntary labour and professional skills of their members. Additionally, relying on volunteers without defined roles was a consistent problem, especially for coalitions with limited funding resources. This prompted comments such as, 'because we're an entirely volunteer-run organisation, just having the human resources to do [work] in every state is really hard' [Interview 5].

Clear and supported leadership roles can assist in participant recruitment, mobilising resources, transferring skills (through continuity of learning from past experiences), and addressing internal conflicts, especially if a coalition is represented by a diverse network of actors (Vélez-Vélez, 2015). Once leadership was established, however, the direction of the coalition began to achieve clarity, and 'created that shift in the way that the organisation operates and what our aims and activities are today' [Interview 5]. A few coalition actors noted

that once they could establish a clear strategic planning process, they were able to initiate more targeted action plans and build stronger dialogues with key stakeholders, demonstrating their ability to have an active presence. This has been central to the growth of the Australian CFNs examined here. As one interviewee noted, 'It's about focusing on an issue and reframing that issue' [Interview 1], which many Australian coalitions are currently doing around food justice, health and nutrition, climate change and localising supply chains. As a result, some participants observed that change was already unfolding, in that 'the public interest and uptake of food sovereign systems has been speeding up' [Interview 5]. In sum, our findings add greater clarity as to how coalitions' staffing arrangements can increase a coalitions' potential for success, as well-supported leaders are better able to refocus coalition actors' attention (and energy) back to their intended initiatives (Lauby, 2021). The general lack of funding available to support the staff and activities of civic food coalitions in Australia is therefore a major limitation to building more cohesive collective action.

Formalising coalition structures

In CCAT, structure refers to how a coalition is organised, such as through committees or working groups, and by defining roles, writing mandates and setting operational tasks. This is also the period when coalitions define their mission statements and foster collaborative synergies (Butterfoss and Kegler, 2002). Participants in this study generally agreed that developing a coalition structure is a messy and vulnerable process, forcing some groups to rebuild themselves or causing them to fall apart altogether. Despite members coming together under the premise of food system reform, a lack of a clearly defined purpose, values and mission statement caused significant pressure when trying to collectivise and meet targets. For coalitions with weak structures and little diversity, broadening their network proved challenging. For example, one participant said, 'It's always hard getting beyond your website [and] social media because what we found is that you end up just within your own little echo chamber' [Interview 2].

Participants primarily raised concerns about shared purpose and goals if coalitions formed quickly. The most consistent comment was that the initial vision and mission of the coalition was unclear, poorly defined, misrepresented, and/or too inclusive. As one participant pointed out, 'everybody comes with a different vision of what it should be' [Interview 4]. Others elaborated on how the 'image' of their coalition was not diverse or inclusive enough, with remarks such as, 'In its early years, for some people, it just seemed like a ranty, academic, activist organisation' [Interview 5], or, 'It's really hard to bridge [people together, because it] has always been in danger of appearing to be quite sort of artisanal, middle class, like the organic movement' [Interview 2]. These comments draw attention to the limitations of representation affecting civic food coalitions and movements more generally (Mann, 2019; Moragues-Faus, 2017).

Achieving a coalition mission statement took time. A few participants discussed taking two to four years before having a clearly defined and unified group. Even when a mission statement was established, membership engagement became a struggle, as one participant explained, '[Nobody] is accountable to anybody else because we're like a coalition, you get people saying yes to projects, but on behalf of everybody else' [Interview 4]. By contrast, there were some positive learnings emerging around internal governance structures and operation guidelines. Their experiences helped to shape and initiate coalition structures by focusing on core values and building the group 'as a decision tree' [Interview 3] to manage potential tensions and conflicts. These long time frames experienced by coalitions are however often at odds with the quicker pace of government or industry policy submission processes once they become open to the public.

Finally, despite many challenges experienced by coalition actors, most of our participants agreed that grassroots coalitions had the power to initiate deep, structural changes in the food system. As one leader explained, 'building the networks that we've built successfully and unsuccessfully, is this idea that if you've got a question and you run a process that brings lots of other people together, if you do that well, you will find answers [Interview 3]. How to get there, however, was more contentious. For some, 'It's got to be those more grounded networks, away from the politics' [Interview 6]. By contrast, others felt that engaging with

politics was necessary if coalitions were going to scale up from local initiatives and address systemic issues in the food system. In sum, this study's findings illustrate that specific conditions must be established within coalitions (e.g., defined purpose, governance structures and roles) before coalition members can implement more comprehensive and tailored action plans directed at other levels.

Discussion: From coalitions to social movements

The objective of our paper was to examine the dynamics that occur when civic food coalitions form and attempt to transform the food system. We did so by documenting the experiences of CFN leaders in Australia, thus building on previous studies that have positioned coalitions as crucial to the creation of movements (Brooker and Meyer, 2019; Diani, 2003; McCammon and Van Dyke, 2010; Shawki and Schnyder, 2021). Our findings described above highlight the importance of the formation stage for ensuring coalition stability, a key requirement for coalitions to progress to the stages of maintenance and institutionalisation (and thus impact).

Determining the stability of a coalition in the Australian context appears to be primarily contingent on formalising its purpose, key structures, and roles. Coalitions that did not do so faced a variety of struggles, including higher propensity for member conflict, lowered capability to manage external resources, poor organisational culture, weak staff and member management, less committed members and lower member satisfaction, weaker collaboration and participation processes, diminished trust amongst members and partners, and ineffective implementation of action plans. These day-to-day stresses compounded leaders' concerns about the strategic capacity of coalitions to scale up; a problem common to other countries as well (see Hoey and Sponseller, 2018). Barriers such as these do not stop coalitions from forming or functioning, but they do make it harder to achieve their goals, and so delay and/or disrupt the process that enables scaling up to be effective (McCammon and Moon, 2015). We therefore add that a food coalition's capacity to 'scale up', if it so chooses, depends not only on coalition actors' ability to attain (and influence) a targeted outcome (such as a specific food policy change), but to also sustain relations between actors who may address food politics from different angles and from different networks (i.e., health networks working with food/climate networks). However, this requires an understanding by coalition actors as to why establishing strong foundations is vitally important during coalition formation.

Our findings also speak to the question of how SM mobilisation might be contributing to the transformation of the current food system. First, we think that a strength of Australian food coalitions is that they are not necessarily responding to a larger transnational food movement, but are instead dealing with real-life community issues and finding solutions to meet those needs (Diani et al., 2010). In North America, for example, the steep rise in the number of food policy councils and food coalitions is a direct response to the lack of government bodies able to address food-related issues (McCartan and Palermo, 2017). This has forced civic groups to take action and 'fill in' for the government – a situation also reflected by interviewees in this study in Australia. On the one hand, this locates coalitions in a particular social-political position and situates them in specific community locales (Born and Purcell, 2006; Teixeira and Motta, 2022). Shared problem definitions and ideologies that resonate locally are thus crucial for the formation of coalitions, as this is what initially unites coalition volunteers and helps them to manage the inevitable challenges they face (Johnson and Andrée, 2019; Di Gregorio, 2012). Like Hoey and Sponseller (2018), we found that disagreements over substantive goals within coalitions had sometimes been a barrier to building inclusive strategies for collective action, despite motivations based on the shared belief that the current system needed to change (Enriquez, 2014). Unfortunately, having broad ideational goals could also mean a loosely formed vision, which was not always conducive to establishing a clear coalition identity. This stalled the process for effective action across scales. The experiences of our participants confirmed that, while shared ideology can help coalitions to form, it may not be sufficient to rely on as the only factor to sustain coalitions, especially those focused on addressing ongoing systemic problems (like hunger or ecological degradation) in their local communities (Haydu 2012; McCammon and Moon, 2015; Van Dyke and Amos, 2017). This is particularly relevant considering the recent emphasis by coalitions such as AFSA and NENA on establishing wide-ranging national frameworks, statements

or policy 'pathways'.

Second, if SMs are viewed as a collection of networks sharing a unified collective identity, and coalitions are seen as 'networks in action' (Fox, 2010), this implies the need for high levels of inclusion and collaboration (Beamish and Luebbers, 2009; Di Gregorio, 2012). However, networks will still need to address differing values, and possibly power imbalances, which might prevent different sectors and civic actors from effectively collaborating (Moragues-Faus, 2017). There are some challenges with this, as the findings here reveal. Even though networks can coordinate and agree on joint action, the work is often (if not always) implemented by coalitions. This points to the crucial role of coalitions in the actual practice of collective action, and as catalysts for more active food citizenship (Renting et al., 2012; Schroering and Staggenborg, 2022). While our findings support this, ensuring broad and inclusive representation can be problematic. We found that coalitions' potential to instigate more inclusive forms of participation can be limited by person-to-person conflict and loosely defined organisational structure. This was captured by participants who discussed the extensive difficulties that arose around decision making, which later affected coalitions' abilities to broaden outwards. Thus, the structure of a coalition appears to influence stability more than do the size and broad representation of the group (Kegler and Swan, 2011; Van Dyke and Amos, 2017). Findings from this study suggest that it might be better to aim for broader representation and diverse membership once coalitions are established and stable. Given that the Australian food movement has struggled to address structural barriers and inequities for those who are most food insecure, it will require additional leadership efforts to encourage opportunities for a wider array of actors and groups to work together. If the Australian food movement is to build and sustain itself through its CFNs, it will also need to support the growth and stability of civic food coalitions that are explicitly focused on action.

Conclusion

Studying coalitions has provided valuable insights into how civic actors are actively responding to and creating opportunities to transform the food system. In this paper, by focusing on the experiences of Australian civic food coalition leaders, we have sought to build on existing studies of CFNs and their potential to create transformative pathways. Within the literature, coalitions have been widely suggested to be a necessary feature for transformative food systems to grow; they can become the catalyst for multi-scalar action, which in turn leads to the discovery of new pathways to address current social-ecological issues.

This research has demonstrated that forming civic food coalitions is one of many important pathways for civic actors to influence food politics. This is because coalitions can provide opportunities to widen civic participation and strengthen collaborative processes between individual actors, CFNs, and local communities. This can subsequently increase the density of social networks over time and across scales, and, in turn, build movements that address issues which may be both translocal and transnational in scope. We have argued that strong foundations are however needed in the early stages of coalition formation, because this is where group cohesion, purpose and functionality are established and sustained. Our findings show that formally organising around an agreed goal, and then establishing a shared purpose, identity, and vision, can sustain coalitions as they grow. Although the challenges to coalition building are numerous, our findings also demonstrate the potential for coalitions to affect changes that are often unobtainable by individual actors or networks on their own. This provides important clarification on the ways in which food coalitions form and operate in practice (in Australia) and sets the scene for future research to further consider the conditions required to maintain and institutionalise more impactful civic food coalitions.

References

AFSA (2022) People's Food Plan. Available at: https://afsa.org.au/category/peoples-food-plan/

Andrée P, Clark JK, Levkoe CZ and Lowitt K (2019) Introduction: Traversing theory and practice social movement engagement in food systems governance for sustainability, justice, and democracy. In: Andrée P, Clark JK, Levkoe CZ and Lowitt K (eds) *Civil Society and Social Movements in Food System Governance*. New York: Routledge, pp. 1-18.

Arnold G (2011) The impact of social ties on coalition strength and effectiveness: The case of the Battered Women's Movement in St Louis. *Social Movement Studies* 10(2): 131–50.

Beamish TD and Luebbers AJ (2009) Alliance building across Social Movements: Bridging difference in a peace and justice coalition. *Social Problems* 56(4): 647–676.

Blay-Palmer A, Sonnino R and Custot, J (2016) A food politics of the possible? Growing sustainable food systems through networks of knowledge. *Agriculture and Human Values* 33(1): 27–43.

Born B and Purcell M (2006) Avoiding the local trap. *Journal of Planning Education and Research* 26(2): 195–207.

Butterfoss FD (2007) *Coalitions and Partnerships in Community Health*. Newark: John Wiley & Sons.

Butterfoss FD and Kegler MC (2002) Toward a comprehensive understanding of community coalitions. Moving from practice to theory. In: Di Clemente RJ, Crosby RA and Kegler MC (eds) *Emerging Theories in Health Promotion Practice and Research Strategies for Improving Public Health*. San Francisco: Jossey Bass, pp. 157–193.

Brooker ME and Meyer D (2019) Coalitions and the organization of collective action. In: Snow DA, Soule SA, Kriesei H and McCammon HJ (eds) *The Wiley Blackwell Companion to Social Movements*. 2nd ed. Newark: John Wiley & Sons, pp. 252–268.

Burton P, Lyons K, Richards C, Amati M, Rose N, Des Fours L, Pires V and Barclay R (2013) *Urban Food Security, Urban Resilience and Climate Change. National Climate Change Adaptation Research Facility.* Available at: https://www.nccarf.edu.au/publications/urban-food-security-urban-resilience-and-climate-change

Canal Vieira L, Serrao-Naumann S and Howes M (2019) Local action with a global vision: The transformative potential of food social enterprises in Australia. *Sustainability* 11(23): 1-16.

Caraher M, Carey R, McConell K and Lawrence M (2013) Food policy development in the Australian state of Victoria: A case study of the Food Alliance. *International Planning Studies* 18(1): 78–95.

Carey R, Caraher M, Lawrence M and Friel S (2015) Opportunities and challenges in developing a whole-of-government national food and nutrition policy: Lessons from Australia's National Food Plan. *Public Health Nutrition* 19(1): 3–14.

Carrad A, Aguirre-Bielschowsky I, Reeve B, Rose N and Charlton K (2022) Australian local government policies on creating a healthy, sustainable, and equitable food system: Analysis in New South Wales and Victoria. *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Public Health* 46 (3): 332-339.

Daphi P, Anderl F and Deitelhoff N (2022) Bridges or divides? Conflicts and synergies of coalition building across countries and sectors in the Global Justice Movement. *Social Movement Studies* 21(1-2): 8–24.

Di Gregorio M (2012) Networking in environmental movement organisation coalitions: Interest, values or discourse? *Environmental Politics* 21(1): 1–25.

Diani M (2003) Networks and social movements: A research programme. In: Diani M and McAdam D (eds) *Social Movements and Networks*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Diani M, Lindsay I and Purdue D (2010) Sustained interactions? Social movements and coalitions in local settings. In: Van Dyke N and McCammon HJ (eds) *Strategic Alliances Coalition Building and Social Movements*. Minneapolis:

University of Minnesota Press, pp. 219-238.

Diani M and McAdam D (2003) *Social Movements and Networks: Relational Approaches to Collective Action*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Dixon J and Richards C (2016). On food security and alternative food networks: Understanding and performing food security in the context of urban bias. *Agriculture and Human Values* 33(1): 191–202.

Eggert LK, Blood-Siegfried J, Champagne M, Al-Jumaily M and Biederman DJ (2015) Coalition building for health: A community garden pilot project with apartment dwelling refugees. *Journal of Community Health Nursing* 32(3): 141–150.

Enriquez E (2014) Undocumented and Citizen Students Unite. *Social Problems* 61(2):155–174.

FAO, IFAD, UNICEF, WFP and WHO (2020) *The state of food security and Nutrition in the World 2020. Transforming Food Systems for Affordable Healthy Diets*. Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. Available at: http://www.fao.org/3/ca9692en/online/ca9692en.html

Flick U (2007) *Qualitative Research Kit: Designing Qualitative Research.* Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications Ltd.

Folke C, Carpenter SR, Walker B, Scheffer M, Chapin, T and Rockström J (2010) Resilience thinking: Integrating resilience, adaptability and transformability. *Ecology & Society* 15(4): 20.

Fox J (2010) Coalitions and networks. In: Anheier HK and Toepler S (eds) *International Encyclopedia of Civil Society*. New York City: Springer, pp. 486 - 492.

Gawerc MI (2020) Diverse social movement coalitions: Prospects and challenges. *Sociology Compass* 14(1): 1-15.

Ghaffari M, Armoon B, Khoramrooz S and Harooni J (2023) Community Coalition Action Theory: Introducing an interventional application to confronting Covid-19. *International Quarterly of Community Health Education* 43(2): 211-217. https://doi.org/10.1177/0272684X211006549

Guenther KM (2010) The strength of weak coalitions: Transregional feminist coalitions in Eastern Germany. In: Van Dyke N and McCammon HJ (eds) *Strategic Alliances Coalition Building and Social Movements*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, pp. 119-139.

Haydu J (2012) Frame brokerage in the pure food movement, 1879–1906. *Social Movement Studies* 11(1): 97-112.

HLPE (2019) *Agroecological and other innovative approaches for sustainable agriculture and food systems that enhance food security and nutrition.* A report by the High Level Panel of Experts on Food Security and Nutrition of the Committee on World Food Security, Rome. Available at: https://www.fao.org/3/ca5602en/ca5602en.pdf

Hoey L and Sponseller A (2018) 'It's hard to be strategic when your hair is on fire': Alternative food movement leaders' motivation and capacity to act. *Agriculture and Human Values* 35: 595-609.

Holt-Giménez E and Shattuck A (2011) Food crises, food regimes and food movements: Rumblings of reform or tides of transformation? *The Journal of Peasant Studies* (38)1: 109-144.

Johnson C and Andrée P (2019) Pathways to co-governance? The role of NGOs in food governance in the Northwest Territories, Canada. In: Andrée P, Clark JK, Levkoe CZ and Lowitt K (eds) *Civil Society and Social Movements in Food System Governance*. Abingdon: Routledge, pp. 43-62.

Kegler MC and Swan DW (2011) An initial attempt at operationalizing and testing the Community Coalition Action Theory. *Health Education & Behavior* 38(3): 261–270.

Larder N, Lyons K and Woolcock G (2014) Enacting food sovereignty: Values and meanings in the act of domestic food production in urban Australia. *Local Environment* 19(1): 56–76.

Lauby F (2021) The leadership challenge: Undocumented youths in social movement coalitions in the United States. *Social Movement Studies* 20(5): 549–566.

Levi M and Murphy H (2006) Coalitions of contention: The case of the WTO protests in Seattle. *Political Studies* 54(4):

651–670.

Lohest F, Bauler T, Sureau S, Mol JV and Achten WMJ (2019) Linking food democracy and sustainability on the ground: Learnings from the study of three alternative food networks in Brussels. *Politics and Governance* 7(4): 21–31.

Lourival I and Rose N (2020) From Nar Nar Goon to Koo Wee Rup: Can participatory food policy making processes contribute to healthier and fairer food systems in the Australian municipal context? A case study from Cardinia Shire, Melbourne. *Journal of Hunger & Environmental Nutrition* 17(2): 265-299.

Luque JS, Tyson DM, Bynum SA, Noel-Thomas S, Wells KJ, Vadaparampil ST, Gwede CK and Meade CD (2011) A social network analysis approach to understand changes in a cancer disparities community partnership network. *Annals of Anthropological Practice* 35(2):112–135.

Lyons K, Richards C, Desfours L and Amati M (2013) Food in the city: Urban food movements and the (re)-imagining of urban spaces. *Australian Planner* 50(2): 157–163.

MacRae R and Donahue K (2013) Municipal food policy entrepreneurs: A preliminary analysis of how Canadian cities and regional districts are involved in food system change. Toronto Food Policy Council. Available at: https://foodsecurecanada.org/resources-news/resources-research/municipal-foodpolicy-entrepreneurs

Mann A (2019) *Voice and Participation in Global Food Politics*. Abingdon: Routledge.

Mann A (2021) *Food in a Changing Climate*. Bingley: Emerald Publishing.

Marsden T and Morley A (2014) Current food questions and their scholarly challenges: Creating and framing a sustainable food paradigm. In: Marsden T and Morley A (eds) *Sustainable Food Systems: Building a New Paradigm*. Abingdon: Routledge, pp. 1-29.

Martínez-Torres ME and Rosset PM (2010) La Vía Campesina: The birth and evolution of a transnational social movement. *The Journal of Peasant Studies* 37(1): 149–175.

Mattioni D (2021) Constructing a food retail environment that encourages healthy diets in cities: The contribution of local-level policy makers and civil society. *International Journal of Sociology of Agriculture & Food* 27(1): 87-101.

McCammon HJ and Moon M (2015) Social movement coalitions. In: Della Porta D and Diani M (eds) *The Oxford Handbook of Social Movements*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 326–339.

McCammon HJ and Van Dyke N (2010) Social movement coalition formation. In: Van Dyke N and McCammon HJ (eds) *Strategic Alliances Coalition Building and Social Movements*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, pp. xi-xxviii.

McCartan J and Palermo C (2017) The role of a food policy coalition in influencing a local food environment: An Australian case study. *Public Health Nutrition* 20(5): 917–926.

McMichael P (2008) Peasants make their own history, but not just as they please. *Journal of Agrarian Change* 8(2-3): 205–228.

Merriam SB and Tisdell EJ (2015) *Qualitative Research: A Guide to Design and Implementation.* Hoboken: Jossey-Bass & Pfeiffer Imprints.

Meyer D and Corrigall-Brown C (2005) Coalitions and political context: U.S. movements against wars in Iraq. *Mobilization: An International Quarterly* 10(3): 327–344.

Miller RL, Reed SJ, Chiaramonte D, Strzyzykowski T, Spring H, Acevedo-Polakovich ID, Chutuape K, Coope-Walker B, Boyer CB and Ellen JM (2017) Structural and community change outcomes of the Connect-to-Protect Coalitions: Trials and triumphs securing adolescent access to HIV prevention, testing, and medical care. *American Journal of Community Psychology* 60(1-2):199–214.

Moragues-Faus A (2017) Problematising justice definitions in public food security debates: Towards global and participative food justices. *Geoforum* 84: 95–106.

Nemes G, Chiffoleau Y, Zollet S, Collison M, Benedek Z, Colantuono F, Dulsrud A, Fiore M, Holtkamp C, Kim TY, Korzun M, Mesa-Manzano R, Reckinger R, Ruiz-Martínez I, Smith K, Tamura N, Viteri ML and Orbán É (2021) The impact of COVID-19 on alternative and local food systems and the potential for the sustainability transition: Insights from 13 countries. *Sustainable Production and Consumption* 28: 591–599.

Parker F and Morgan E (2013) Hungry for change: The Sydney Food Fairness Alliance. In: Farmar-Bowles Q, Higgins V and Millar J (eds) *Food Security in Australia: Challenges and Prospects for the Future.* New York: Springer, pp. 113-127.

Pereira LM, Drimie SB, Maciejewski K, Biggs R and Tonissen PB (2020) Food system transformation: Integrating a political–economy and social–ecological approach to regime shifts. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* 17(4): Article 1313.

Renting H, Schermer M and Rossi A (2012) Building food democracy: Exploring civic food networks and newly emerging forms of food citizenship. *International Journal of Sociology of Agriculture and Food* 19(3): 289-307.

Schiff R (2007) *Food Policy Councils: An Examination of Organisational Structure, Process, and Contribution to Alternative Food Movements*. PhD Thesis, Murdoch University, Australia.

Schiff R and Levkoe CZ (2014) From disparate action to collective mobilization: Collective action frames and the Canadian food movement. *Advances in Sustainability and Environmental Justice* 15: 225-253.

Schlosberg D and Craven L (2019) *Sustainable Materialism: Environmental Movements and the Politics of Everyday Life*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Schroering C and Staggenborg S (2022) Volunteer and staff participants in social movements: A comparison of two local coalitions. *Social Movement Studies* 21(6): 782-797.

Shawki N and Hunter G (2022) Building Solidarity in the Slow Food Movement. *International Journal of the Sociology of Agriculture and Food* 28(2): 75-93.

Shawki N and Schnyder M (2021) Coalition dynamics in transnational social movements: Analyzing the EU Food Policy Coalition. *Global Society* 37(1): 134-156.

Sippel SR and Larder N (2019) Bridging divides: Constructing food sovereignty in Australia. *The Journal of Peasant Studies* 48(2): 368-386.

Smith K (2019) Localizing SDG2 zero hunger through 'Fair Food' in Australia. *Asian Development Perspectives* 10(2): 135-148.

Smith K (2018) Zero Hunger discourse: Neoliberal, progressive, reformist or radical? In: Constance D, Konefal J and Hatanaki M (eds) *Contested Sustainability Discourses in the Agrifood System.* New York: Routledge, pp 89-110.

Smith K (2023) Scaling up civic food utopias in Australia: The challenges of justice and representation. *Sociologia Ruralis*, 63, 140–159. https://doi.org/10.1111/soru.12368

Smith K, Lawrence G, MacMahon A, Muller J and Brady M (2016) The resilience of long and short food chains: A case study of flooding in Queensland, Australia. *Agriculture and Human Values* 33(1): 45–60.

Staggenborg S (2010) Research on Social Movement Coalitions. In: Van Dyke N and McCammon HJ (eds) *Strategic Alliances Coalition Building and Social Movements*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, pp. 316-329.

Sumner J (2018) Values in motion: The local organic food co-ops network in Ontario, Canada. *The International Journal of Sociology of Agriculture and Food* 24(1): 97–111.

Tarrow S (2005) *The New Transnational Activism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Tattersall A (2010) *Power in Coalition: Strategies for Strong Unions and Social Change*. New York: Routledge.

Teixeira MA and Motta R (2022) Unionism and feminism: Alliance building in the Brazilian Marcha das Margaridas. *So-*

cial Movement Studies 21(1-2): 135–151.

Thornton A (2017) The Lucky Country? A critical examination of community gardens and city-community relations in Australian cities. *Local Environment* 22(8): 969–985.

Van Dyke N and Amos B (2017) Social movement coalitions: Formation, longevity, and success. *Sociology Compass* 11(7): 1-17.

Vélez-Vélez, R (2015) All Puerto Rico with Vieques: Mobilizing support through social skills and field dynamics. *Social Movement Studies* 14(5): 539–56.

Williams MJ and Lillian T (2023) Diverse infrastructures of care: Community food provisioning in Sydney. *Social & Cultural Geography* 24(8): 1362-1382.

Wood B, Barbour L and Lindberg R (2018) *The Human Right to Food and Water in Australia. A Compilation of Specific Food Security Strategies*. Right to Food Coalition. Available at: https://righttofood.org.au/resources/

Zoll F, Specht K and Siebert R (2021) Alternative = transformative? Investigating drivers of transformation in alternative food networks in Germany. *Sociologia Ruralis* 61: 638– 659.

Local food systems and community development: a symbiotic relation? A case study of three rural municipalities in Norway

Paper first received: 27 May 2023; Accepted: 20 March 2024; Published in final form: 11 April 2024
https://doi.org/10.48416/ijsaf.v30i1.534

Hege WESTSKOG,[1] Mette Talseth SOLNØRDAL,[2] Mikkel VINDEGG,[3] Anders TØNNESEN,[3] Thea SANDNES,[1] Bård Sødal GRASBEKK[4] and Ingrid CHRISTENSEN[3]

Abstract

Policy makers and researchers are increasingly emphasising the need for more diversified and localised food systems. This study investigates relations between local food systems and community development, revealing how local food is linked with identity, social relations, and community pride. We also address barriers and enablers for developing such links. We conducted an in-depth case study of local food systems in three Norwegian rural municipalities. Our results show how local food systems are linked to geographical location, and how they strengthen social relations by bringing actors in the food system closer together, fostering mutual responsibilities, pride, and a sense of belonging in local communities. We argue that local food is not only for somewhere, but from here, thus adding meaning and accountability to local food regimes. Local food exchange is motivated by mutual moral obligations and value-driven preferences, enabling reconnection between different actors in the food system. This is a central factor in local food's contribution to community development and sustainability in food systems. Our findings furthermore demonstrate the importance of non-conventional exchange channels for local food distribution and exchange. Some findings nevertheless also show a need for efforts to make local food more affordable and available for most citizens. Together, the cases studied show that a holistic and context-dependent development of local food systems is necessary to provide pathways for communities to expand the role of local food as part of their community development and in order to enhance sustainability.

[1] Centre for Development and the Environment at the University of Oslo, Norway
[2] School of Business and Economics, UiT The Arctic University of Norway, Norway
[3] CICERO – Center for International Climate Research, Norway
[4] National association of Norwegian architects, Norway

Corresponding author: Hege Westskog, hege.westskog@sum.uio.no

Biographical notes

Dr. Hege Westskog is an economist and senior researcher at the Centre for Development and the Environment at the University of Oslo. She heads the thematic area Municipalities as change agents in Include – a research centre for socially inclusive energy transition.
Dr. Mette Talseth Solnørdal is an economist and associate professor at the School of Business and Economics, UiT The Arctic University of Norway. Her research focuses on organisation management and environmental innovation processes in organisations.
Dr. Mikkel Vindegg is a social anthropologist and senior researcher at CICERO – Center for International Climate Research. His research focuses on social and environmental aspects of energy transitions, climate adaptation, and food systems.
Dr. Anders Tønnesen is human geographer and senior researcher at the CICERO – Center for International Climate Research. His research focuses on environmental policymaking, local conditions for climate policy and the role of municipalities as change agents.
Thea Sandnes is a research assistant at the Centre for Development and the Environment at the University of Oslo working on food and sustainability.
Bård Sødal Grasbekk is landscape architect and worked as a consultant at the management consultancy firm Insam when the study was conducted. He now works at the National association of Norwegian architects as an advisor.
Ingrid Christensen is a PhD Candidate at the University of Oslo and CICERO - Center for International Climate Research, working on local climate policy and collaborative governance.

Acknowledgements and Data Protection

The authors wish to thank the informants for sharing their thoughts and experiences with us. We are also grateful to the user partners linked to the project (Tromsø, Hurdal and Oslo Municipalities, Spire, KS and A-lab) for their comments on the research questions, research design and indicative results. These were valuable in moving the research forward. We would also like to thank the two anonymous reviewers for insightful suggestions and comments on the paper. The project is part of the Research Centre Include – Research centre for socially inclusive energy transitions – funded by the Norwegian Research Council, project no. 295704. This support is highly appreciated. We obtained permission from the Norwegian Centre for Research Data (NSD) to conduct this research. We have followed their guidelines for data management and protection. The permission reference at NSD is 102299.

Introduction

> *For me, the more I know about a product, the stronger my attachment to it. It becomes 'mine' to a larger extent and part of my life. It gives me a strong sense of belonging. (…) The local apple juice becomes like a wine to be savoured. (Household informant, Hurdal)*

The panel of the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES, 2019) and the International Panel of Experts on Sustainable Food Systems (IPES-Food, 2023) draw attention to the many challenges with today's highly globalised and industrialised food system, including its detrimental impacts on biodiversity and ecosystem functions. They argue for a more diversified and localised agriculture that engages more actors than just producers in food systems (public sector, civil society consumers and grassroot movements) to enhance sustainability (IPBES, 2019; 882, IPES-Food, 2023).

Previous research argues that the physical and psychological distancing between food production and consumption caused by globalised food systems generates disconnection, with consequences including a 'loss of agricultural resilience and diversity, degradation of the environment, dislocation of community, [and] loss of identity and place' (Feagan, 2007: 38). Furthermore, supermarkets and large retailers that emphasise low-cost production and standardisation choose conventional food supply chains over local food suppliers and thus reward disconnected industrialised production (Dimitri and Gardner, 2019). As a result, customers lose control over the source and quality of their food and become increasingly distanced from food practices and knowledge (Campbell, 2009; Allen, 2010; Eriksen, 2013).

This study investigates relations between local food systems and community development. We also address barriers and enablers for development of such links. We aim to contribute to a research area that IPBES (2019: 882) has characterised as inadequate, by enhancing the understanding of localised food systems, their community dimensions, and how they may work to engage other actors.

The literature reports contradictory conclusions as to the advantages of localised food systems. Focusing on the local scale and assuming that there are benefits to the mere fact of being local – such as benefits for social and environmental sustainability, compared with the 'global' level –, has been termed the 'local trap' because there is nothing inherent about any level of scale (Born and Purcell, 2006). Winter (2003) warns of the dangers of becoming too obsessed with 'the local' and the risk of 'defensive localism', where people celebrate the local and reject outside influences. However, several authors who discuss the 'local trap' also believe that local food systems may foster and develop social relationships and re-spatialise and re-socialise food, which are among the benefits for community development (DuPuis and Goodman 2005; Venn et al., 2006). The solution to the 'local trap' is to perform 'reflexive localism', emphasising social justice for all, avoiding elitism, and ensuring that local alternatives are not co-opted by corporations (DuPuis and Goodman, 2005). As Sonnino (2010) argues, localisation can mean empowerment if it is implemented in the right way.

Schnell (2013) argues that in contrast to a global food system, which may produce disconnections between different actors in food supply chains, local food systems may enable connections to place and local ecologies (Dowler et al., 2009; Harris, 2010). Schnell (2013) also disputes claims against the environmental advantages of the local food movement. DeWeerdt (2009) argues that food transported over long distances does not necessarily have a larger ecological footprint or climate impact; it's impact depends on how it is transported and produced. Although this might be correct in many instances, this instrumental focus may lead to an oversimplification of the local food debate. 'Eating locally' often entails 'a desire to reintegrate food production and consumption within the context of place' (Schnell, 2013: 615). In other words, strengthening local food systems is also about social innovations, not just in the agricultural sector but in society beyond (Chiffoleau and Loconto, 2018).

Although we recognise the dangers of the local trap, we also see the potential of local food systems to contribute to community development and counter the negative impacts of globalised food systems. In responding to the climate and environmental crises and the urgency for a sustainable transition, researchers have highlighted the need to develop attractive local communities with qualities that enable the inhabitants to live, work and spend their leisure time there (Westskog et al., 2022). Moreover, research on local food systems in Europe has shown that 'Local cultures clearly have an impact on the implementation of environmental policy' (Häyrynen et al., 2022: 35), making local communities essential in ensuring sustainable food production. However, exploring the contributions of local food systems to community development is not straightforward. The term 'community development' is understood in many ways (Phillips and Pittman, 2008; Gilchrist and Taylor, 2016). Most authors have viewed a community as a set of practices in which people are linked or connected (Somerville, 2016). Moreover, the term 'development' has various connotations. These usually refer to change for the better (Cavaye, 2006). However, what 'better' involves is often unclear. In this study, community development is understood through the voices of the informants in three rural municipalities in Norway: Vågå, Inderøy, and Hurdal. Three categories of stakeholders are represented in our investigation: local governments, professionals, and households. To understand the relationship between local food systems and the development of their communities, we address their understanding of local food, motivations for engaging in the local food system, and related food practices in their respective communities.

In framing connections between local food and place, we build on previous food regime studies (Friedmann, 2005) that have identified a 'food from somewhere' versus 'food from nowhere' binary in global supply chains (Campbell, 2009). With reference to George Ritzer's (2007) work, we argue that local food is socially connected in especially significant ways. We show how the socially substantive content of local food links it to identity, social relationships, and community pride. In our analyses we also draw on studies on exchange systems of local food (Arnalte- Mur et al. 2020), showing the importance of non-conventional distribution channels and how the exchange of local food is socially embedded (Polanyi, 1944/2001). Our study contributes evidence for how the exchange of local food is closely linked to local social, economic, and environmental considerations. These links constitute the core contribution of local food to community development. Thus, our study provides learning for debates on local food as a means to advance community development in the face of sustainability challenges, and for communities following this pathway.

Our analytical framework is presented below and guides the discussion of results. In the section on *Methodology and context*, we describe our methodology, including the data selection and collection, and provide a contextual background of the local food strategies in our case municipalities. The *Results* section presents our empirical results structured around the main perspectives from our analytical framework. The *Discission* section, discusses the main results, with an emphasis on how local food systems contribute to community development, as well as barriers that hinder this development. We conclude in the last section

Framework for analysis

Understanding 'local'

Local food systems are multifaceted, and the meaning of 'local food' depends on the research context. However, they all share socially substantive meanings and content that are often contrasted directly with larger food producers and national or international distributors. Using the concept territorial fitting, Tisenkopfs et al. (2020) analyse and discuss how small farms take advantage of local assets and connections to operate. Farmers' activities are fitted to their surroundings (the territory), as opposed to bigger farms that operate detached from local communities and geographies. Territorial fitting operates in the form of social, environmental, and economic embeddedness, which contributes to its substantiveness.

Local food systems may be related to three domains of proximity: relational, value-oriented, and geographical

(Eriksen, 2013). Relational proximity refers to relationships between local food actors who are connected through production and distribution practices. Values of proximity refer to values (e.g., place of origin, traceability, authenticity, freshness, and quality) that different actors attribute to local food. Geographical proximity may be the most distinct feature of 'local' (Adams and Adams, 2011; Onozaka et al., 2010). It commonly refers to the explicit spatial and geographical location (e.g. area, community, place, or geographical boundary), distance and/or radius within which food is produced, sold, consumed and/or distributed (Eriksen, 2013). Local food is often associated with quality, a notion based on local traditions (Venn et al., 2006) and niche businesses (Yalçın-Heckmann, 2021). This signifies the importance of values and relational proximities for local food consumers. The term local food connotes attention to detail, quality control and even a moral obligation between seller and customer (Berta, 2022).

Some authors have suggested that local food movements may educate consumers to be responsible for and aware of local food traditions by improving their cooking skills, strengthening their local community, and ensuring environmental sustainability (Albrecht and Smithers, 2018; DesRivières et al., 2017). In other words, local food enables a broad range of connections to place (Schnell, 2013), which can foster changes in the fundamental priorities of life. Seen as a whole, this shift in priorities can also provide further impetus for an eco-economic recalibration in rural areas, that can contribute to 'realign production-consumption chains and capture local and regional value between rural and urban spaces' (Kitchen and Marsden, 2009: 275).

From "food from somewhere to 'food from here'

Friedmann (2005) analyses a shift to a global 'corporate-environmental food regime'. She argues that this led, amongst other things, to a form of greenwashing of certain supply chains based on selectively appropriated demands from environmental movements. Environmentally destructive supply chains were kept intact in parallel with higher quality products – products often presented through a veneer of environmentally friendly audits and traceability of suppliers. According to Campbell (2009) this led to an (only) nominally socially and environmentally responsible 'food from somewhere'. Campbell identifies an implicit argument in Friedman's (2005) analysis that 'to become sustainable, small-scale food systems need to be both socially and environmentally embedded' (Campbell, 2009: 313). In this article, we identify such a perception of 'local food' in the three Norwegian rural communities.

We introduce Ritzer's (2007) dialectic of international capitalist goods as existing in a tension between traits related to 'something' and 'nothing' qualities, as a parallel to Campbell's (2009) analysis of global food regimes. In Ritzer's terms (2007: 36), nothing is 'a social form that is generally centrally conceived, controlled and comparatively devoid of distinctive substantive content'. From a food consumer perspective, then, nothing food is generic (e.g., store brands of supermarket chains). In contrast, something is 'generally indigenously conceived, controlled and comparatively rich in substantive content' (Ritzer, 2007: 38). Local food is a quintessential something. It cannot share social forms related to nothing and still be local food (Schnell, 2013). We show that local food is socially and environmentally embedded in ways that go beyond previous corporate-environmental 'food from somewhere' in what may be 'genuinely novel ways' (Campbell 2009: 318). Succinctly put, one might say that local food is 'food from here'. In line with our research participants' perspectives, we understand local food as being 'from somewhere' – a more substantive understanding than Campbell's (2009). Thus, 'local food' is not only traceable back to its origins, it is traceable to a specific location, and often a specific individual, that the consumer knows personally. This adds social meaning to the food as a product, and an added layer of meaning and accountability to (local) food regimes. By contrast, this meaning and accountability exist only in abstract forms in the powerful audit cultures (Campbell 2009: 316) of 'food from somewhere' regimes. Local food in Hurdal, Inderøy, and Vågå is not just from 'somewhere', it is from 'here' – a specifically known place. Although tentative, our findings indicate that local food as a 'food from somewhere' is less dependent on 'food from nowhere' as its binary opposite because it is more intrinsically valued, both socially and environmentally. It therefore potentially contributes to an eco-economic shift (Kitchen and Marsden, 2009) as the need for environmental transformation becomes ever more pressing.

How general this tendency is across Norway and internationally is however beyond the scope of this article and requires further research.

Exchange of local food: the importance of non-conventional markets

Arnalte-Mur et al. (2020:5) emphasise 'integration into non-conventional value-chains' as one of the key drivers of small farmers' contributions to food systems and food security. Non-conventional value chains are both individual and collective. Farmers may sell directly from their farms or through marketplaces such as farmers markets or digital platforms. What those non-conventional exchange systems have in common is their ability to re-spatialise and re-socialise food (Venn et al., 2006). Several previous studies have shown that consumers of local food are motivated by social attitudes and local identity (Adams and Adams, 2011). Thus, local food exchange may contribute to restructuring food systems by connecting consumers, producers, and food in different economic spaces where social embeddedness and trust are key, and where the producer and consumer take back the power currently held by large corporations in the industrialised food system. In this way, local food may facilitate the development of a socially embedded commodity (Polanyi, 1944/2001) where exchange incorporates principles of mutual moral obligations, trust, bonding, and redistribution alongside that of barter based on profit maximisation.

Polanyi (1944/2001) does not distinguish between barter of something versus nothing products (i.e. products with or without socially substantive content). Barter of something is shown to be of importance for local food exchange and small farms. Galli et al. (2020) argue for instance that small farms directly contribute to their local communities through local supply markets, off-farm labour markets, and participation in activities in their communities – all factors that also ensure their livelihoods. Hence, for these types of markets the economy is embedded in social relations rather than being disembedded – a nuance not captured in how Polanyi characterises barter in general (Polanyi, 1944/2001: 60). This embeddedness-somethingness is inimical to 'food from nowhere' and can further eco-social tendencies previously identified in 'food from somewhere' regimes (Campbell, 2009).

An important potential barrier for local food systems' contribution to community development is related to food justice. High prices may for instance prevent disadvantaged groups from taking part in local food systems. Hinrichs (2000) examines the tension between instrumentalism and embeddedness in local food exchange, exemplified by the farmer's market and community-supported agriculture. Inequality still exists in these places, regardless of how socially embedded they may appear to be, particularly because many of these markets offer 'exclusive products'. DesRivières et al. (2017) argue that for systemic changes to take place in the food system, food justice must be addressed as a broad goal to allow for the availability of local food for all types of consumers.

Methodology and context

Case selection

The municipalities of Vågå, Hurdal, and Inderøy were selected as the cases for the study. As selection criteria we considered similarities regarding centrality and demographics, and variation in promotion of local food strategies. The latter selection criteria were informed by prior research on local food (see *Data analysis*). Table 1 summarises the core features of the case municipalities based on data from Statistics Norway (SSB, 2023). The National Centrality Index (Høydahl, 2017) describes concentrations of inhabitants, workplaces, and service. It ranges from 1–6, where 1 denotes the highest concentration. The three case municipalities were indexed from 4–5, and were rural communities characterised by small populations, low agglomerations in their administrative centres and distant from larger municipalities with over 50,000 inhabitants.

Table 1: Core features of the case municipalities

	National Centrality Index	Population 2021 (number of inhabitants)	Population changes in period 2011–2021	Administrative centre (inhabitants)	Nearest municipality with > 50,000 inhabitants (distance*)	Agricultural properties
Inderøy	4	6,700	0.7 %	Straumen (1600)	74 km	642
Vågå	5	3,700	-4.1 %	Vågåmo (1500)	162 km	445
Hurdal	4	2,600	8.4 %	Torget (700)	57 km	235

*Measured in km overhead line between administrative centres.

Data collection

Data were collected from June 2021 to November 2021. Our methods involved document studies, observations, and qualitative interviews. The document studies comprised a screening of municipal plans and strategies with a focus on initiatives to promote local food and environmental issues associated with local food. This information was pertinent when selecting case municipalities, and for understanding the local context.

We also reviewed web pages and material on local food initiatives and producers in the case communities. By visiting the communities and the local food distributers (grocery shops, markets, cafés, and restaurants), we noted the types of local food that were sold, as well as where and how they were sold. This contextual understanding also informed us about target groups. In addition, we conducted eight background interviews with municipal employees and politicians in Trøndelag County (where Inderøy Municipality is located), who had worked extensively with local food strategies. These interviews increased our overall understanding of the central challenges and opportunities surrounding local food systems, and were valuable input to the empirical fieldwork.

We focused on three main categories of informants: local governments (i.e., politicians and municipal employees); professionals (i.e., farmers, local food producers and distributors); and households (consumers). We aimed at recruiting households of different social backgrounds, ages, and sizes (i.e., number of members). In total, 52 interviews were conducted. The household informants received a gift card of 500 NOK (approximately 50 euros) to ensure the participation of a broader range of informants. Table 2 provides an overview of the numbers and types of informants.

Table 2: Number of informants by category and municipality

Category of informants	**Inderøy**	**Vågå**	**Hurdal**	**Total**
Local government*: municipal employees and local politicians	6	5	4	15
Professionals: farmers, food producers, distributors	6	5	4	15
Households**	10	6	6	22
Total	22	16	14	52

* The number of informants from local governments varied because employees in different municipalities had different areas of responsibility of relevance for our study.

** The number of household interviews in Inderøy was higher than that for the other case municipalities because some interviews were conducted as part of research for a Master's thesis.

We adjusted the interview guide according to the informant and different case contexts. In interviewing the municipal employees, politicians, and professionals, we aimed to elicit the respondents' conceptualisation of 'local food', their engagement with local food and their motivations for this engagement, as well as their views and experiences with local food development in their communities. We also addressed the climate and environmental issues associated with local food. In interviewing the households, we addressed the same main topics, along with food practices and factors affecting the consumption of local food.

Data analysis

All interviews were recorded, and detailed notes were taken covering the main topics of the interview guide to facilitate the analysis of the data. In most interviews, at least two researchers were present; one led the interview and the other took detailed notes. Summaries of the interviews were also distributed to the informants for their comments and approval.[1]

Case studies focus on 'relation to environment', that is, 'context' (Flyvbjerg, 2011: 301). We start with the assumption that while the structures and processes described here may manifest differently in other contexts, they are relevant to the overall tendencies that apply in other settings. In analysing the empirical data, the authors conducted a thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006). In conjunction with a set of main questions from the interview guide, they identified and summarised key themes highlighted by the informants. At least two authors contributed to the extraction of data from each case study, and one author contributed to all three cases.

We began the study with a review of the central literature on local food (see *Introduction* and *Framework for analysis*). This guided the formulation of our research question, as well as the case selection and the collection of empirical data. Based on themes emerging from the thematic analysis of our empirical findings, the authors developed the analytical framework for the study, bringing further insights to relations between local food systems and community development. By using this theoretical framework for analyses to further understand the relations between local food systems and community development, we aim to offer lessons to other communities wanting to strengthen their strategies in this field.

The empirical cases: contextual descriptions

As in most other countries, the industrialisation of the food system has been prevalent in Norway. Traditionally, Norwegian agriculture has been characterised by small-scale farming, often in combination with fishing or forestry. However, in recent decades, the sector has been restructured, and the number of farms in Norway has declined steeply (Eldby, 2016). This was true in our case municipalities, although they had also been recognised for their explicit promotion of local food strategies. Because of geographical, historical, and cultural differences, there were large variations between the cases regarding how these strategies were operationalised and promoted.

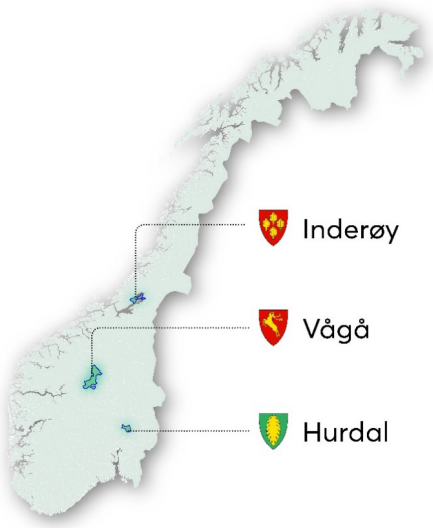
Inderøy Municipality is located on the coast in the middle of Norway (see Figure 1), in a region called Innherred. Inderøy is in the distant northern outskirts of Trondheim City. Local food has been a central part of business development, and its success is referred to in Inderøy's municipal plan (Inderøy Municipality, 2023). The Golden Road (TGR) was established in 1998 as an initiative by local food producers and supported by Inderøy Municipality. TGR is a cooperative of 22 members who collaborate on tourism in Inderøy; 'quality at all levels' is their central tenet. It has become a nationally and internationally renowned tourist destination, with a focus on food, art, and cultural experiences. Since the inception of the TGR, several local food initiatives—both traditional and innovative—have been implemented and developed into professional businesses.

Vågå Municipality is in the mountainous part of southern Norway (see Figure 1), far from larger cities in the Gudbrandsdalen Valley. Vågå is characterised by its picturesque shieling landscape and rich food culture. Arne

[1] This was not done for the household interviews because they were more easily anonymised.

Brimi, a nationally renowned chef and food pioneer from Vågå, has been an important figure in generating knowledge about and pride in local food. His entrepreneurial activities have elevated the role of local food as a business development strategy and have influenced perspectives on the importance of continuing local food traditions.

Figure 1: Map of Norway showing the case municipalities



Hurdal Municipality is in the eastern inland part of Norway (see Figure 1), at the fringe of the housing and labour market of the capital city of Oslo in the Øvre Romerike region. Hurdal has attained status as a sustainability forerunner because of its local ecovillage, a community-driven initiative adopted into public policy through a zoning plan. In 2014, Hurdal Municipality adopted sustainability as a basis for its community development, branding itself as the 'Sustainable Valley'. Hurdal has many small farms that mainly provide part-time employment for farmers. The municipal plan underlines the importance of maintaining local food production for food security and the varied cultural landscapes it fosters (Hurdal Municipality, 2023). The municipality has promoted local food in its sustainability work by supporting a local food network called Hurdalsmat (food from Hurdal; not currently operational).

Results

Food from here and for someone

Most of the informants in this study defined local food as food produced within a certain distance from their communities and linked to their regions. This food was perceived as high-quality (all cases), and in environmentally conscious ways (most prominent in Hurdal). In Inderøy, the perception of local food was delimited by geography:

> *Local food is food that's produced and processed in the vicinity. That means Inderøy and Innherred. (Municipal informant, Inderøy)*

In Vågå, the understanding of local food was based on products originating from the geographical region of Gudbrandsdalen. A national meat distributor was commonly mentioned as being incommensurable with local food. In both Vågå and Hurdal, informants mentioned that the national distributor had sought to maintain a dominant position in the Norwegian meat supply by buying local slaughterhouses. It was also stated that meat bought and sold by this company was not local, even if it was produced by locals.

Several informants emphasised that local food production fostered food quality, animal welfare and less food waste. In Vågå, consistent references were made to the food perspectives of the celebrity chef Arne Brimi, who came from this area. Regarding the use of local resources, outfield pastures were referred to as a core component of agriculture in this mountainous part of the country. In Hurdal, most informants still considered that 'local' was limited to their region, although the geographical demarcation was not as specifically defined as it was in the other two case municipalities. Many informants added another perspective to the understanding of 'local food', associating it with organic and environmentally conscious production.

Local food producers reported that their main motivation for food production and processing was to make a living from the family farm and improve the farm's economic and social conditions. They considered local food production an important facilitator of sustaining economic and environmental activity and maintaining

family togetherness at the farm:

> *When I pass the farm on to my children, the land should be in better shape than when we started. (Farmer, Inderøy)*

As motivations for their work, farmers also stressed the importance of bringing traditions forward and protecting the local culture and landscape. Some local food producers emphasised that producing food for local inhabitants was their primary motivation, rather than attracting tourists or contributing to economic growth. A fruit business in Hurdal refused to sell the business' entire stock to a large buyer; they wanted to sell their products to locals first. A farmer in Vågå commented:

> *It seems like many [people] think that what's produced here is mainly for tourists. That's a key issue for me. I want my vegetables to go to the locals.*

Another farmer in Vågå did not want to expand production by taking over more farmland, despite an offer to do so. Expansion would require extensive mechanisation, which would not be in line with distinguishing features of local food production.

Households were motivated to buy local food because of its perceived superior quality and taste. Many informants also emphasised the importance of supporting farmers and the community by 'purchasing locally'. Such support was often motivated by the perceived injustice of farmers' (low) incomes and the desire to ensure rural vitality. The informants also highlighted the importance of supporting local producers in creating job opportunities. The community dimension as a motivation for local food purchases was the most prevalent in Inderøy, which was motivated by an overall spirit of support and cooperation in the community (as inspired by the municipal motto, 'best – together'). In Hurdal, some household informants emphasised a close connection between local food and a sense of belonging to a community, which increased their appreciation of food consumption:

> *For me, the more I know about the product, the stronger my attachment to it. It becomes 'mine' to a larger extent and part of my life. It gives me a strong sense of belonging (....) The local apple juice becomes like a wine to be savoured. (Household informant, Hurdal)*

In Hurdal, household informants also highlighted that they were motivated to buy local food because of its perceived environmental friendliness and better animal welfare performance compared with supermarket products.

Exchange of local food

The local governments supported local food businesses for various reasons, especially regarding the degree to which local food was considered a pathway to economic growth and community development. In Vågå, local food was often included as a strategy to develop employment and business opportunities (e.g., by attracting tourists). In Vågå's municipal master plan, local food was included as part of a business development strategy and an opportunity for the economic growth of the community (Vågå Municipality, 2023). This was echoed by a municipal representative in Vågå:

> *The tourism industry has a direct impact on the establishment of local food producers—it stimulates demand for local food.*

Local food initiatives in Vågå can be seen in relation to the municipality's challenging population decline (see Table 1) and the need to create new business opportunities to spur local economic development and promote the attractiveness of small-scale farms that typically engage in local food production. In the interviews, municipal officers also mentioned that jobs and business opportunities were motivators for engagement in local food in Inderøy and Hurdal. However, in Inderøy, local food was also important for place development connected to the municipal centre (see *Barriers and enablers*). In Hurdal, local food was promoted as part of the municipality's overall sustainability strategy (see *Methodology and context*).

Inderøy stood out among our case municipalities as the place where local food initiatives and engagement were the most visible and developed. Here, the informants expressed a sense of pride that their municipality had accomplished so much and had become famous for their local food culture. Household informants appreciated the possibility of visiting local farms and buying local food. Some said they proudly showed Inderøy's local food farms and shops to visitors, and they frequented restaurants that served local food. In all three case municipalities, household informants often bought local food on exclusive occasions when they were willing to spend more time and money on food:

> *[Grocery chains] have lots of offers and discounts, so that's all right for everyday stuff. But if I have a guest over or there's a birthday, I might buy cheese from [a local cheese producer]. (Household informant, Inderøy)*

The distribution of local food through alternative and informal channels (i.e., beyond local grocery stores and restaurants) increased the availability of local food to the household informants:

> *I buy one sheep a year from [local farm A] and keep [it] in the freezer … beef from [local farm B]—nice, long-hoofed outdoor cattle. And pork down at [local farm C]—free-range pigs. (Household informant, Hurdal)*

Because of Inderøy's well-developed local food market, these channels were not as important there as in the other case municipalities. However, there were also traces of an informal market in Inderøy, exemplified by fishermen who sold fish from their boats. When we visited a small community nearby, we encountered men who were gutting fish and informally selling their recent catches to locals. However, accessing such channels requires knowledge of both the producers and the seasonality of their products:

> *If you're aware of and interested there are offers [of local food]. You need to get in touch; no one is pushing it. Local products are shared only on Facebook. (Household informant, Vågå)*

Local food producers engaged in multiple activities to secure their income, such as food production in addition to running a distillery and providing activities and accommodation for tourists. Some also had regular jobs off their farms. Many farmers sold products through alternative market channels, ran farm shops, offered 'pick your own' berries, and directly distributed farm products through REKO-rings (a retail and distribution model)[2] and farmers' markets. Opinions varied regarding the importance of local grocery stores as distribution channels for local food producers.

All three case communities had strong traditions of producing red meat. Although the literature clearly states that reductions in the production and consumption of red meat are necessary to reduce climate emissions (e.g., Willett et al., 2019), many informants expressed scepticism regarding the extent to which reducing local red meat production and consumption should be part of a climate transformation strategy:

> *I'm all for eating Norwegian food…. We need to support what [type of] agriculture we've got. I eat all the red meat I want. That's not where we need to make cuts in greenhouse gas emissions. (Household informant, Inderøy)*

Instead, the use of local resources was seen as crucial for a sustainable future:

> *People buy almond milk and think that's sensible. The almonds are from California, where there's water scarcity. In those cases, it's better to buy milk made from Norwegian resources. That's more sustainable. (Municipal informant, Vågå)*

Barriers and enablers

A main barrier to increasing the consumption of local food was the price of local food sold in grocery stores and restaurants. These prices meant that only some local foods were considered everyday products

[2] REKO is a model for selling and distributing food. Customers order local food directly from producers. Producers deliver the food to agreed marketplaces where customers pick up their orders. Those administering REKO-rings are usually volunteers. The original phrase behind the acronym is 'Rejäl Konsumtion' from Swedish, meaning 'fair consumption'.

(e.g., potatoes from a local farm or locally produced meatballs in Vågå; vegetables from the garden centre or soup from the butcher in Inderøy). Another barrier mentioned by nearly all household informants was convenience. To buy everything at the grocery store was considered to be far more convenient compared to driving between localities to buy local food.

To some extent, in both Vågå and Hurdal, household informants saw limited availability of local food as a barrier, even though, as described above, non-conventional exchange channels did improve this situation. In Vågå, the availability of local food products in grocery stores was limited, and restaurant opening hours signalled that they were marketed for tourists rather than locals. We observed this when we wanted to taste local traditional food; it was late August and just off high season, but most restaurants had already significantly reduced their opening hours. Locally produced Vågå ice cream was available only at the tourist information office. In Hurdal, the local food available in the grocery store was obviously marketed to high-income groups and cabin owners. In contrast, in Inderøy, locals have regular, easy access to local food. Many destinations that serve local food are open all year round.

In Vågå and Hurdal, several farmers and local food business owners emphasised that local food deliveries were challenging. Although some local businesses in Vågå (i.e., a guesthouse) and Hurdal (i.e., a hotel) tried to accommodate local food deliveries, many informants said it was challenging for small-scale farmers to provide the large quantities required to cater to the large volume of tourists and deliveries to grocery stores. Producers and other informants emphasised moreover that local food producers needed to be good at many things. In addition to producing food, local food producers also had to be good at marketing their products, processing food, running a business and welcoming visitors:

> *We're noticing a considerable favouring of [producers] who are the best at marketing and storytelling (....) This is a considerable barrier for farmers who are used to selling through their cooperatives. Handling sales themselves has a high threshold. (Municipal informant, Vågå)*

In all case municipalities, the informants pointed to the potential for local food production to contribute to a lively local community and higher food quality. However, the involvement of the three municipalities studied in promoting local food systems varied. Inderøy Municipality had worked intensely to develop the town centre as an attractive and more densely populated place. In 2020, they won a state prize for 'Sustainable cities and communities'. An important motivation to win the prize was to facilitate the development of small-scale businesses that were central to local food initiatives in the municipal core. This enabled local farmers to flourish through the production of local food side products, such as jam, cheese, soups, and drinks that were sold in shops to visitors and locals. In 2023 a blue mould cheese from a local cheesemaker in Inderøy was crowned 'cheese of the year' in the World Cheese Award competition. Furthermore, in Inderøy the ability to visit farms through TGR was well developed, allowing guests to directly encounter farming activities and food production. The Vågå and Hurdal Municipalities had not promoted local food to the same extent. In Vågå, local food was promoted to a certain extent as part of the municipality's business development strategy. In Hurdal, the only involvement of the municipality in promoting local food was to support a nascent regional food network, which was still in the pilot stage at the time of this research (Romeriksmat). There had been a previous effort to establish a cooperative with a local food brand, but this was not successful.

Many informants pointed out that a precondition for successful local food initiatives was local conventional food production, as well as related national food cooperatives that provided knowledge and predictability in terms of access to raw materials and infrastructure. Local customers were also important, particularly before local food producers and businesses had established marketing and sales channels:

> *Most is sold through my own farm shop, and we deliver local vegetables to restaurants and hotels. (….) We don't have enough products to sell through grocery stores. We don't have enough volume to be interesting to [a nationwide store chain]. (Farmer, Inderøy)*

The informants described regional business incubators (Vågå), regional distribution companies (Inderøy and Vågå), and national support schemes for innovation and entrepreneurship (Innovation Norway, all case municipalities) as factors that enabled the development of local food systems.

Overview of results

Table 3 provides an overview of our results, showing similarities and exceptions between the case municipalities, which are found in the *Discussion*.

Table 3: Overview of main results by case municipality

	Inderøy	Vågå	Hurdal
Substantiveness/ Somethingness - The understanding of local food.	Emphasis on the geographical region, Innherred, and community. Little focus on production methods.	Emphasis on the geographical region Gudbrandsdalen, and local food traditions rather than production methods.	Regional, organic, and environmentally conscious production commonly associated with local produce.
Substantiveness/ Somethingness - Motivation: professionals	Make a living and a community, continue traditions.	Make a living, continue traditions.	Make a living, continue traditions.
Substantiveness/ Somethingness - Motivation: households	Quality, supporting local farmers and community.	Quality, supporting local farmers.	Quality, environmental aspects, supporting community.
Exchange of local food - Strategies: local government	Employment and business opportunities, place development.	Employment and business opportunities.	Part of sustainability strategy; employment and business opportunities.
Exchange of local food - Distribution channels	Alternative and informal channels for distribution of some importance.	Alternative and informal channels for distribution important.	Alternative and informal channels for distribution important.
Barriers	High prices. Local food for exclusive occasions, but some local foods considered as everyday products (e.g., Inderøy "Sodd")	High prices. Local food for exclusive occasions, but some local foods considered as everyday products (e.g., potatoes). Local food availability, local food deliveries.	High prices. Local food for exclusive occasions. Local foods not considered as everyday products. Local food availability, local food deliveries.
Enabling conditions	Strong sense of community, established structures for promoting and distributing local food, national financial support systems.	Legacy of Arne Brimi; well-established regional food distributor, alternative food distribution channels, national and regional financial support systems.	Sustainability engagement, alternative distribution channels, national financial support system.

Discussion

Local food as 'food from here'

Our results show that the substantive content of local food is linked to place, bringing producers and consumers closer together, and developing a sense of pride in the local community. Within the context of a global 'food from somewhere' regime, local food stands apart as 'food from here'. In addition to local food adding to consumers' wellbeing (taste, feeling of exclusiveness), buying local is also a citizen act (Sagoff, 1988) of supporting farmers and the development of the local community. Factors like protecting local culture and landscapes strongly motivated farmers' work. Some farmers even explicitly stated that they produced food for their local community, not for tourists. In this way, local food is socially embedded.

Categorisations of local food are however diverse, since definitions depend on context. Consistent with other research, we find that the term 'local' often implies geographical limits (Eriksen, 2013; Onozaka et al., 2010), but specific boundaries are subjective. Distribution in nationwide channels is the main way that locally produced food loses its social substantiveness (e.g., a domestic meat corporation was mentioned in both Vågå and Hurdal). However, a local producer could also buy nothing milk from a nationwide dairy producer and use it to make local cheese, such as in Inderøy, which would regain the status of local food (i.e., something). The distribution channel and direct producer–consumer interactions are important to regain this status (Venn et al., 2006). Yet relationships between established large-scale actors and new small-scale local producers are ambivalent and go beyond the issue of simple categorisation: large-scale actors can serve as an important factor in the economic viability of local food production, such that consumers see the higher prices of local products as justified.

As previously noted, applying Campbell (2009) and Ritzer's (2007) differentiation between something and nothing distinguishes local food as 'food from here'. This entails an especially strong social and environmental connectedness which can contribute to changing and maintaining more sustainable food production through greater accountability in production, distribution, and consumption. This again has direct potential for community development. However, the specific ways local food figures in a given community will differ. Local supply chains can make the most out of local conditions, but this comes with the recognition that the conditions for making local food vary and will be less suitable or even unfeasible in some locations.

Exchange of local food embedded in social relations

Like Arnalte-Mur et al. (2020), we show that local food producers are highly dependent upon non-conventional exchange channels to sell their products. The REKO retail and distribution model operated by volunteers is one way of directly connecting producers and consumers to local food exchange channels. Visiting farms, farmers' markets, farm shops, hunting cooperatives, the sale of small quantities of food by word of mouth and the personal production of vegetables and fruits constitute other distribution channels. These have in common that they restructure institutions for food exchange into systems that rely on social relationships and trust (Venn et al., 2006). Non-conventional distribution channels facilitate local food's embeddedness in social relations, rather than disconnection from them, which is the case in global food systems. Polanyi (1944/2001) argued that market exchange motivated by for-profit caused social relations to be subsumed under markets. However, our results demonstrate that non-conventional market exchange constitutes a central element for re-connection between different actors in the food system, thus fostering social relations in communities. Hence, it nuances the argument that market exchange is disembedded from social relations (Polanyi, 1944/2001) – a disembeddedness considered to be a consequence of the globalised food system (Feagan, 2007).

A striking result of our investigation is the degree to which producers and consumers selling and buying local food were motivated by factors other than profit maximisation and the minimisation of food costs in

(for instance supporting their local communities, protecting the local culture and landscape). This motivation is consistent with 'the moral economy' (Yalçın-Heckmann, 2021) and citizens' preferences (Sagoff, 1988). Furthermore, the motivations of local food producers overlap with the literature on niche businesses (Berta, 2022). Niche businesses focus on selling 'quality' products that can be recognised by customers as distinct from mass-produced goods. This focus parallels our something–nothing perspective (Campbell, 2009; Ritzer, 2007). The focus on quality often presupposes strict control over production, which can be difficult to maintain if the business becomes too large for the owner to oversee (Berta, 2022). This may lead to the motivation to not expand or even to scale down operations, which was an argument expressed by one informant who was a producer. Although a tentative result, the same principles of moral obligation and quality control may be extended to the local environment, facilitating local sustainability through the food system (DesRivières et al., 2017).

IPBES (2019) and IPES-Food (2023) argue for engaging actors other than producers in developing sustainable food systems. Our results show that the exchange of local food outside the conventional food system engaged consumers, promoted volunteer work (e.g., organising REKO-rings), and to some extent involved local governments (e.g., providing space for farmers' markets and REKO-rings). In this regard, following IPBES (2019), it could be argued that compared with conventional markets, these forms of exchange contribute to developing more sustainable food systems.

Barriers: local food for special occasions or as daily fare?

The results of our study indicate that local food is often considered a luxury aimed at high-income consumer groups and for purchase on special occasions. However, results also demonstrate that some types of food in the case municipalities were considered everyday products (e.g., potatoes in Vågå and vegetables from a greenhouse producer in Inderøy). The prices of most local food products were perceived as high by most informants compared with those of generic and mass-produced ones in grocery stores. In addition, lack of convenience and availability were barriers to buying local food. This raised the questions of who local food is aimed for and who benefits from local food offers? Inequality still exists within distribution channels that directly link consumers and producers of local food, despite its social embeddedness (Hinrichs, 2000). Critiques of the argument that 'local' is superior to national and global have emphasised the risk that inequalities are reproduced at a local level. Hence, for local food to contribute to community development, it must address this issue by for instance ensuring that local food is to a larger extent daily fare for everyone.

Finally, many informants see local food systems as more sustainable than globalised food markets. However, surprisingly few informants suggested that reductions in the consumption and production of red meat should be part of Norwegian climate strategies. Instead, red meat was considered intertwined with local culture and impossible to replace with other agricultural products. Hence, resistance emerges when community development is viewed as changing the values and goals that underpin the local food system. Such resistance may diminish the potential of local food to contribute to community development, at least regarding the climate dimension (Willett et al., 2019) of an environmentally friendly food system.

Local food and its contribution to community development

Local food is tied to its territory (Tisenkopfs et al., 2020) and contributes to the connection to place (Schnell, 2013). Through our study we have revealed what this subjectiveness of local food entails and how it is directly linked to the communities in which its produced and consumed. First of all, local food systems connect different actors in the food system and enable development of social relations in communities. Secondly, the non-conventional exchange channels central to local food distribution are not motivated by profit alone, but rely on trust, social relations, and a sense of belonging which may constitute a potential for community development.

However, the aspects of community development wished for by local government actors varied across

our case municipalities. The economic opportunities that local food could provide in terms of jobs and business development were clearly highlighted by local government informants in Vågå and Inderøy. In these municipalities, emphasis was placed on the economic opportunities that local food could bring to community development. In Inderøy, the opportunities that it could provide for place development were also emphasised, especially in relation to the community centre at Straumen. Here, unlike in Vågå, there were many offers for local inhabitants related to local food, even out of season, including restaurants and cafés serving local food and shops specialising in local food products. Informants from Hurdal highlighted the fact that sustainability was an important part of their community development. Local food was envisioned as a contributing factor by providing opportunities for food to be produced in an environmentally friendly way.

Our results also reveal how local governments may help to develop local food systems. They have an important role in supporting bottom-up initiatives of local food producers, and promoting local exchange and distribution systems for local food. As shown in the case of Inderøy, local food as a strategy for community development was strengthened by the bottom-up involvement of the local community through a strong cooperative culture. Community development is however not a unitary process, and it can proceed at varying rates in different areas in the same region, as in Hurdal. While Hurdal Municipality's support for local food systems is currently low, the municipality has made great progress in other areas, such as the sustainability-focused transformation of the municipal rural centre. Hurdal's overall sustainability transformation work has been strong (Westskog et al., 2022). In Vågå, the municipality has not been particularly engaged in developing local food strategies or supporting local initiatives. Nonetheless, private initiatives thrive in a strong food culture. Together, the cases show a two-way relation between local food and community development. Community initiatives and public sector actors can help develop local food systems, and conversely, local food systems can be a crucial contributor to community development. Or, aspects of local food and community development may mutually strengthen each other, creating a symbiotic relation.

Concluding remarks

IPBES (2019) and IPES-food (2023) emphasise the importance of a diversified and localised agriculture that also engages consumers, the public sector, and others in the food system to establish a more sustainable food system. At the same time, they call for more research on the issue, emphasising that the research underpinning these conclusions is inadequate (IPBES, 2019). We explored relations between local food systems and community development in three rural municipalities in Norway, addressing both the ways in which the substantive content of local food links it to identity, social relationships and community pride, and barriers and enablers for such development.

Our results clearly indicate that local food is substantive by nature. This links it to geographical location and gives it social meaning by bringing actors in the food system more closely together and fostering pride and a sense of belonging to local communities. Accordingly, we argue that local food is not only from somewhere, but from here, thus adding meaning and accountability to local food regimes and lessening their dependency on global scale regimes (Campbell, 2009); it both re-spatialises and re-socialises food (Venn et al., 2006). More research on these relations is needed, but our results suggest that local food can contribute to an eco-economic shift (Kitchen and Marsden, 2009).

We show furthermore how non-conventional exchange channels facilitate and are a prerequisite for local food distribution and exchange. As such, our results are in line with Arnalte-Mur et al.'s (2020) arguments that integration into non-conventional value chains is a key driver for small farms' contribution to food systems. We argue that these types of exchange are embedded in social relations rather than being disembedded; they are driven by factors consistent with the 'moral economy' (Yalçın-Heckmann, 2021) and not only for-profit. Hence, these findings add a nuance to Polanyi's (1944/2001) characteristic of barter as actions without socially substantive content. Market exchange of local food may build social relations and support community development through trade.

Our results broaden the understanding of how local food supports community development. Our three case municipalities emphasised diverse aspects of local food in their strategies. In two of the case municipalities, local food initiatives were considered opportunities for attracting tourists with a view to strengthening economic growth by creating jobs and increasing incomes. The place development dimension was also highlighted as a goal for local food initiatives. One municipality additionally emphasised local food systems' potential to foster sustainable development, including the environmental benefits local food might provide. Together, our cases show that the development of local food systems must be viewed holistically if they are to contribute to community development.

The findings nevertheless also demonstrate the need for broader engagement in making local food affordable and available for most citizens. A more localised food system has many benefits, beyond contributing to a more sustainable food system as called for by IPBES (2019), but attention to inequality issues is required to fulfil the potential of local food, both for sustainability and for community development.

A common finding across all our cases is local food systems' ability to nurture social relations and enhance environmentally beneficial outcomes by developing attractive local communities, thus enabling inhabitants to spend more time in their closest surroundings (Westskog et al., 2022). This leads us to the following recommendations for local communities wanting to expand the role of local food systems:

- Support non-conventional exchange systems, for instance by providing spaces for farmers markets, REKO-rings, or places where different food actors can meet.
- The production and consumption of local foods that are considered daily fare should be encouraged, to diminish factors of local food that may increase inequality, like being expensive and for special occasions.
- Local governments are important as facilitators of local food exchange, for instance by promoting networks for local food actors.
- A holistic and context-dependent development of local food systems is necessary to provide pathways for communities expanding the role of local food as part of community development.

References

Adams DC and Adams AE (2011) De-placing local at the farmers' market: consumer conceptions of local foods. *Journal of Rural Social Sciences* 26(2): 74-100.

Albrecht C and Smithers J (2018) Reconnecting through local food initiatives? Purpose, practice and conceptions of 'value'. *Agriculture and Human Values* 35(1): 67–81.

Allen P (2010) Realizing justice in local food systems. Cambridge Journal of Regions, *Economy and Society* 3(2): 295–308.

Arnalte-Mur L, Ortiz-Miranda D, Cerrada-Serra P et al. (2020) The drivers of change for the contribution of small farms to regional food security in Europe. *Global Food Security*, 26: 100395.

Berta AG (2022) Freedom and control: analysing the values of niche business owners in Aarhus, Denmark. In: Yalçın-Heckmann L (ed) *Moral Economy at Work: Ethnographic Investigations in Eurasia* [E-book]: Berghahn Books, pp. 20-36.

Born B and Purcell M (2006) Avoiding the local trap: scale and food systems in planning research. *Journal of Planning Education and Research 26*(2): 195–207.

Braun V and Clarke V (2006) Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology* 3(2): 77-101.

Campbell, H (2009) Breaking new ground in food regime theory: corporate environmentalism, ecological feedbacks and the 'food from somewhere' regime? *Agriculture and Human Values*, 26: 309-319.

Cavaye J (2006) Understanding community development. *Cavaye Community Development* 1: 1–19.

Chiffoleau Y and Loconto A (2018) Social Innovation in Agriculture and Food: Old Wine in New Bottles? Editorial Introduction. *The International Journal of Sociology of Agriculture and Food* 24 (3): 306-317.

DesRivières CP, Chuenpagdee R and Mather C (2017) Reconnecting people, place, and nature: examining alternative food networks in Newfoundland's fisheries. *Agriculture and Food Security* 6(33): 1–11.

DeWeerdt S (2009) Is local food better? *World Watch Magazine* (May/June): 6–10.

Dimitri C and Gardner K (2019) Farmer use of intermediated market channels: A review. *Renewable Agriculture and Food Systems* 34(3): 181–197.

Dowler E, Kneafsey M, Cox R et al. (2009) 'Doing food differently': Reconnecting biological and social relationships through care for food. *The Sociological Review* 57(2): 200–221.

DuPuis ME and Goodman, D (2005) Should we go "home" to eat? Toward a reflexive politics of localism. *Journal of Rural Studies* 21(3): 359–371.

Eldby H (2016) The development of farming in Troms County (in Norwegian). Agri-Analyse Report 4/2016. Available at: https://www.agrianalyse.no/getfile.php/13671-1513245629/Dokumenter/Dokumenter%202016/Rapport%204%20-%202016%20Utviklingen%20i%20jordbruket%20i%20Troms-korr.pdf (accessed 12 November 2023).

Eriksen SN (2013) Defining local food: constructing a new taxonomy–three domains of proximity. *Acta Agriculturae Scandinavica*, Section B–Soil and Plant Science 63(Suppl. 1): 47–55.

Feagan R (2007) The place of food: mapping out the 'local' in local food systems. *Progress in Human Geography* 31(1): 23–42.

Flyvbjerg B (2011) Case study. In: Denzin NK and Lincoln YS (eds) *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research* London: Sage 4th ed., pp. 301–316.

Friedmann, H. (2005) From colonialism to green capitalism: Social movements and emergence of food regimes. In: *New Directions in the Sociology of Global Development* (pp. 227-264). Emerald Group Publishing Limited.

Galli F, Grando S, Adamsone-Fiskovica A et al. (2020) How do small farms contribute to food and nutrition security? Linking European small farms, strategies and outcomes in territorial food systems. *Global Food Security,* 26: 100427.

Gilchrist A and Taylor M (2016) *The Short Guide to Community Development*. UK: Policy Press.

Harris EM (2010) Eat local? Constructions of place in alternative food politics. *Geography Compass* 4(4): 355–369.

Häyrynen S, Farinella D and Mononen T (2022) The Local Culturalisation of Pro-Environmental Policy: Cultural responses to organic farming in Sardinia and Finnish. *The International Journal of Sociology of Agriculture and Food* 28 (1): 23–39.

Hinrichs CC (2000). Embeddedness and local food systems: notes on two types of direct agricultural market. *Journal of Rural Studies* 16(3): 295–303.

Hurdal Municipality (2023) Kommuneplanens samfunnsdel [Municipal masterplan, societal part] 2018–2040. Available at: https://www.hurdal.kommune.no/contentassets/246277825dc8423fbd85c2b46ecc729a/281117_samfunnsdelen_0100-hbr.pdf. (accessed 14 May 2023)

Høydahl E (2017) Ny sentralitetsindeks for kommunene [New centrality index for municipalities]. SSB Notater 2017/40.

Inderøy Municipality (2023) Kommuneplanens samfunnsdel [Municipal masterplan, societal part] 2017–2030. Available at: Microsoft Word - KOMMUNEPLANENS SAMFUNNSDEL 2021- 2033 vedtatt 14.juni 2021 (002) (inderoy.kommune.no) (accessed 14 May 2023)

Intergovernmental science–policy platform on biodiversity and ecosystem services (IPBES) (2019) Global Assessment Report on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services. Available at: https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.3831673 (accessed 14 May 2023)

International Panel of Experts on Sustainable Food Systems (IPES-Food) (2023) Who's Tipping the Scales? The growing influence of corporations on the governance of food systems, and how to counter it. Available at: tippingthescales.pdf (ipes-food.org) (accessed 21 September 2023).

Kitchen, L and Marsden T (2009) Creating sustainable rural development through stimulating the eco-economy: beyond the eco-economic paradox? *Sociologia Ruralis*, 49(3): 273-294.

Onozaka Y, Nurse G and Thilmany DD (2010) Local food consumers: How motivations and perceptions translate to buying behavior. *Choices* 25: 1–6.

Phillips R and Pittman R (2008) *An Introduction to Community Development.* New York: Routledge.

Polanyi K (2001) *The Great Transformation: The Political and Economic Origins of Our Time* [1944] (2nd ed.). New York: Beacon Press.

Ritzer G (2007) *The Globalization of Nothing 2*. London: SAGE Publications.

Sagoff M (1988) *The Economy of the Earth*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Schnell SM (2013) Food miles, local eating, and community supported agriculture: putting local food in its place. *Agriculture and Human Values* 30(4): 615–628.

Somerville P (2016) *Understanding Community: Politics, Policy and Practice*. Bristol, UK: Policy Press.

Sonnino R (2010) Escaping the local trap: insights on re-localization from school food reform. *Journal of Environmental Policy and Planning* 12(1): 23–40.

Statistics Norway (SSB) (2023). Statistikkbanken, befolkning [The bank of statistics, population] 07459: Alders- og kjønnsfordeling i kommuner, fylker og hele landets befolkning (K) 1986–2022. Statistikkbanken (ssb.no) and landbrukseiendommer [agricultural properties] 06520: Landbrukseiendommer, med bebyggelse og bosetting (K) 2006 - 2021. Statistikkbanken (ssb.no) (accessed 14 May 2023).

Tisenkopfs T, Adamsone-Fiskovica A, Kilis E et al. (2020) Territorial fitting of small farms in Europe. *Global Food Security*, 26: 100425.

Vågå Municipality (2023) Kommuneplanens samfunnsdel 2017–2027. [Municipal masterplan, societal part 2017-2027] Available at: https://www.vaga.kommune.no/_f/p1/i605cf5ec-8dcc-43f7-8f95-ce8ea0ecb144/kommuneplan-2017-27-ny.pdf (accessed 14 May 2023).

Venn L, Kneafsley M, Holloway L et al. (2006) Researching European 'alternative' food networks: some methodological considerations. *Area* 38(3): 248–258.

Westskog H, Aarsæther N, Hovelsrud GK et al. (2022) The transformative potential of local-level planning and climate policies: case studies from Norwegian municipalities. *Cogent Social Sciences* 8(1): 2033457.

Willett W, Rockström J, Loken B et al. (2019) Food in the Anthropocene: the EAT–Lancet Commission on healthy diets from sustainable food systems. *The Lancet* 393(10170): 447–492.

Winter M (2003) Embeddedness, the new food economy and defensive localism. *Journal of Rural Studies* 19: 23–32.

Yalçın-Heckmann L (ed.) (2021) *Moral Economy at Work: Ethnographic Investigations in Eurasia*. New York: Berghahn Books.

Appendix A: Interview guides

Note: this version is translated from the original Norwegian by the authors

Contents

On interview structure 38
Interview guide local food: government employees 39
Sustainable transition and work on local food 39
Local food – business, customer groups and involvement: 39
Climate 39
Barriers, opportunities, and suitability 40
Interview guide local food: businesses 40
Promoting local food - what has been done 40
Local food - business, customer groups, engagement and networks: 40
Climate 41
Measures and policy instruments 41
Barriers, opportunities, and suitability 41
Interview guide local food: households 42
Practice (food and experiences) 42
Food practices 42
Experiences 42
Barriers 42
Values 43
Measures and policy instruments 43

On interview structure

The interviews are semi-structured with room for flexibility. Topics that are relevant and not covered by the guide can come up in the interviews. We provide room for this in addition to covering topics in the guide. Questions that are less relevant to individual cases can be dropped. The interviews are recorded. During the interview, one researcher takes responsibility for the interview, another takes notes (i.e. at least two present at each interview). Interviews of approximately one hour are planned. We start with "obvious" interviewees in the municipality, for example business advisers, and recruit using the snowball method.

Interview guide local food: government employees

Information about the project given before starting

- About the sub-project and the Include research centre
- Ethics approval information and obtain consent
- Permission to record

On the interviewee's work and the organisation

Purpose: Bring out the role and responsibilities of the interviewee.

- Role, responsibility and tasks
- Background

Sustainable transition and work on local food

Purpose: To introduce the main theme in the interviews – transition and local food. Find out what is the motivation for investment (growth strategy/transition strategy) and how they see the connection between sustainable transition and a focus on local food, cooperation with business, importance for population and local development. Here it is important to also probe on whether they have plans/are prepared to also work for level three in climate transition (e.g. less meat production/more fruit and vegetables)

Local food – business, customer groups and involvement:

- How have you (the municipality) worked to promote local food in the municipality?
- What is the background/motivation for promoting/not promoting? (including whether this is seen as a growth strategy or a restructuring strategy/strategy for changing an unsustainable development trend in the economy)
- Who would you describe as key actors (for example local food producers, distributors, business organisations, enthusiasts, etc.) within the field of local food in the region?
- How would you define local in this context?
- How does the municipality collaborate with business to promote/develop local food?
- Has the local population become involved in the development of local food?
    - o If so, in what way? (including facilitating that the entire population can participate)
- To what extent is there cooperation with actors (business, other municipalities, regional and state actors) outside the municipality (geographically) on local food investment?
- How would you characterize the municipality/place (for example - how would someone from Vågå/ Inderøy/Hurdal talk about their place)?
    - o Is local food linked to this?
    - o Are there differences between different population groups when it comes to this?
- Which customer groups are the local food initiative(s) aimed at?
    - Local/visitors/age groups/income groups?
    - In what ways does the focus on specific groups apply?

Climate

- Which units/sectors in the municipalities are normally involved in the work on climate transition?
- What is the municipality's:
    - main target for reducing greenhouse gases?
    - most important management tools/instruments for reducing greenhouse gases?
    - Knowledge of and possible use of the Climate Budget as an instrument?
- Is the work on reducing greenhouse gases linked to other municipal areas of responsibility, for example within health, the environment, schools?

  - o If so, in what way?
- To what extent (and how) is local food production linked to the municipality's climate and adaptation strategy? (also address whether there are plans/motivation to work on restructuring production/ consumption towards more fruit/vegetables and level 3 climate transition).
- To what extent (and how) is local food production connected to the municipality's work with local development?
- What are your views on local food as a local development strategy and climate change strategy.
  - Is this a good strategy?
  - Do you have concerns?

Barriers, opportunities, and suitability

Purpose: Uncover what the municipalities perceive as barriers in working with local food and more specifically - local food as a transition strategy. Bring out the possible disadvantages of local food.

- What is the scope for the municipality to promote local food?
  - Barriers? (practical, political, cultural/value-based)
  - Opportunities? (for example in the form of positive effects on other areas the municipality works with)
- Are there other policies/instruments the municipality should use to promote local food and what could be done more? Probe: What are the reason(s) why these have not been used? (e.g. political opposition)
- To what extent do you see the following three areas of responsibility in connection with promoting local food: place development, local business development and climate transition?
- To what extent are there challenges linked to the focus on local food (Note: first ask the question in general to possibly bring up global justice issues as well, then specify).
  - Are there any groups/residents in the municipality who either do not benefit from the investment or are disadvantaged by it? Why?
  - Are there any areas of responsibility in the municipality that either do not benefit from the investment or are disadvantaged by it? Why?

Interview guide local food: businesses

Information about the project given before starting

- About the sub-project and the Include research centre
- Ethics approval information and obtain consent
- Permission to record

On the interviewee's work and the organisation

Purpose: Bring out the role and responsibilities of the interviewee.

- Role, responsibility and tasks
- Background

Promoting local food - what has been done

Purpose: To introduce the main theme in the interviews - transition and local food. Find out how they see the connection between climate transition and possible promotion of local food, cooperation with the municipality, significance for the population and local development

Local food - business, customer groups, engagement and networks:

- How have you worked to promote your concept for local food (both background for promotion/non-implemented measures and main measures that you have taken)?

- Is your local food promotion linked to experiences for visitors and locals?
    - If so, in what way?
- Have there been changes in your efforts over time?
    - If so, in what way and when?
- Who would you describe as key actors (for example local food producers, distributors, business organisations, enthusiasts, etc.) within the field of local food in this region?
- How would you define local in this context?
- Do you collaborate with any players on local food?
    - If so, in what way?
- Do you have a collaboration with the municipality on local food?
    - If so, in what way?
- How would you characterize the municipality/place (for example - how would someone from Vågå/Inderøy/Hurdal talk about their place)?
    - Is local food linked to this?
    - Are there differences between different population groups when it comes to this?
- Which customer groups are the local food initiative(s) aimed at?
    - Local/visitors/age groups/income groups?
    - Are have you targeted specific groups?
    - Have you been in dialogue with local residents about the development of local food concepts?
    - If so, in what way?

Climate

- Is promotion of local food included as part of a climate transition strategy locally?
    - If not - what is the background for promotion of local food?
- How can local food contribute to local transition to a more climate- and environmentally friendly direction and how can your production contribute in this respect?
- What opportunities are there in the region to change local food production towards more fruit and vegetables and if so, how do you see this?

Measures and policy instruments

Purpose: Find out which instruments/measures they envision could be useful for them and for other local food producers to promote local food

- What do you consider to be the most important instruments/measures to promote local food production (public and own/other industry players)?
- What are your views on investing in local food (public and own/other industry players).
    - Is this a good strategy for site development/local business development/climate change?
    - Do you have any reservations about it?
- What could be relevant measures to promote local food/local as experience and as part of local development?
    - What would be the most important measures for you?
    - How do you think the possibilities are for implementing such measures?

Barriers, opportunities, and suitability

Purpose: Uncover what the business operator perceives as barriers in working with local food and more specifically - local food as a restructuring strategy. Bring out the possible disadvantages of short journeys.

- What are the possibilities for promoting local food?
    - Barriers? (practical, political, cultural/value-based)
    - Opportunities? (for example in the form of positive effects on other areas the municipality works with)
- To what extent do you see the following three areas as connected to local food; place development, local

business development and climate transition?
- To what extent are there challenges linked to the focus on local food (Note: first ask the question in general to possibly bring up global justice issues as well, then specify).
    - Are there any groups/residents in the municipality who either do not benefit from the investment or are disadvantaged by it? Why?
    - Are there any areas of responsibility in the municipality that either do not benefit from the investment or are disadvantaged by it? Why?

Interview guide local food: households

Information about the project given before starting
- About the sub-project and the Include research centre
- Ethics approval information and obtain consent
- Permission to record

About the interviewee
Purpose: Bring out the role and responsibilities of the interviewee.
- job/profession
- owner of a holiday home/access to a holiday home

Practice (food and experiences)

To address participants' food practices, use of local food options and experiences.

Food practices
- What does a normal day look like for your family/you in terms of meals/what do you eat for breakfast, lunch and dinner?
- Who is responsible for preparing the various meals?
- Where do you usually do your shopping?
- Have you bought locally produced food? If so, where?
- What do you think of the local food options that are here?
- What are the reasons why you use/don't use the local options? Are there differences in the family on this? And what is your impression of friends/acquaintances' use of local food?
- Which local food actors do you know from your local community?
- Is local food a topic that may come up in conversations with friends/neighbours? If so, what might you discuss?

Experiences
- What do you do in your spare time and on holidays?
- Do you spend your free time and holidays with friends? Others from the community?
- Who makes the choices when it comes to leisure activities and holidays?
- How would you characterize your village/place/centre?
- What makes you proud of the local community and what is less appealing?
- Have you used any local leisure offers? If so, which ones?
- Have you used offers related to local food production (e.g. open farm etc.)? And if so, what did you think of the experience?
- Have you sought out such offers together with family and friends?
- What are the reasons why you use/don't use these local offers (including local food)? And are there any differences among family/friends on this?

Barriers

The most important obstacles are addressed here - first openly, then connected to main categories (material conditions, experience/knowledge and attitudes)

- What do you think are the biggest obstacles for you/you when it comes to buying local food/using offers on local food as experiences?

Ask more about:

- Price/too expensive?
- Visibility? Knowledge of what is available locally?
- Facilitation of local experience offers (including local food as experiences) (outside the city centre, for example)
- Attractiveness of the offers?
- Other?

Values

This section is to capture attitudes and values around climate, the environment and the importance of the local environment for leisure.

- What is the good life for you?
- How do you think that local experiences/the local environment/local food affect the good life?
- Would you describe yourself as environmentally conscious?
- Do you/any of you work with environmental and climate-related things?
- Are you member of any environmental organisations?

Measures and policy instruments

Here elicit views on possible measures and policy to promote local food and dining experiences.

- Do you think that short-travel (kortreist) alternatives such as local food and local leisure offers will play an important role in climate transitions in the future?
- What do you think are the positive/negative aspects of local options (explain briefly)? Economic? Environmentally? Social/Cultural?
- What do you/you think are important measures for buying more locally produced food?
- And measures to promote short-travelled experiences including experiences related to local food?
- How can the municipality play a role in this?

Rethinking Agrifood Systems in (Post-)Pandemic Times: Moving Beyond Crisis and Recovery Narratives

Paper first received: 30 April 2024; Accepted:30 April 2024; Published in final form: 24 February 2025
https://doi.org/10.48416/ijsaf.v30i1.714

Atakan BÜKE,[1] José Duarte RIBEIRO,[2] Hilde BJØRKHAUG[3] and Sarah Ruth SIPPEL[4]

Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic brought about significant changes in the global agri-food system. It disrupted food supply chains, created labour shortages, instilled fears of food insecurity, and altered market dynamics. The pandemic also highlighted the resilience of alternative food systems through the shortening of food supply chains, a greater appreciation for local agricultural production, increased focus on sustainable practices, the use of technological platforms for direct farmer-to-consumer sales, and policy interventions providing financial and regulatory support to ensure food security. The two special sections of IJSAF titled "The Food System in the (Post-)Pandemic World: Disruptions, Vulnerability, Resilience, and Alternatives" offer an in-depth exploration of the challenges faced by food systems and how various actors - populations, policymakers, and food producers - responded to the disruptions caused by COVID-19. The nine articles included in these sections present ethnographic and qualitative research from different parts of the world and engage critically in discussions regarding disruptions and resilience within agrifood systems during the pandemic. The authors explore how COVID-19 influenced power dynamics among various actors in the food system. These articles are selected from papers presented at the mini-conference of the ISA Research Committee on Sociology of Agriculture and Food (RC40), which took place in October 2022 at Leipzig University. Drawing from the conference and the published articles, this editorial introduction discusses the methodological and theoretical strengths and challenges faced by critical agrifood studies in times of crisis.

[1] Center for Studies in Food Security, Toronto Metropolitan University
[2] Instituto de Ciências Sociais, Universidade de Lisboa
[3] Norwegian University of Science and Technology
[4] Münster University

Corresponding author: Atakan Büke, atakanbuke@yerkure.org

Bibliographical notes

Atakan Büke is an associate member at the Center for Studies in Food Security (CSFS), Toronto Metropolitan University, Toronto, Ontario, Canada. His research interests include the agrarian/peasant question, food regime and agrifood system analysis, agrifood digitalisation, and alternative socio-ecological agrifood movements.

José Duarte Ribeiro is a postdoctoral researcher at the Institute of Social Sciences, University of Lisbon, currently working on the Horizon Europe research project "INCITE-DEM - Inclusive Citizenship in a World in Transformation: Co-Designing for Democracy" (grant agreement 101094258). He is editor-in-chief of the journal RIVAR, edited by the Institute of Advanced Studies at the University of Santiago de Chile (USACH) and holds the early career seat at the Executive Committee of the European Society for Rural Sociology (ESRS).

Hilde Bjørkhaug is a professor of sociology at the Department of Sociology and Political Science at the Norwegian University of Science and Technology (NTNU) with a special interest in the sociology of agriculture and food. Her research areas include agricultural restructuring, politics and power relations in the food system, sustainability, and animal welfare.

Sarah Ruth Sippel is a professor of economic geography and globalisation studies at Münster University. Her research explores the nexus between the financialisation of natural resources, the digitisation of food and farming, and emerging solidarities within global agri-food systems.

ACKNOLWEDGEMENTS

The mini-conference was financially supported by the Research Centre Global Dynamics at Leipzig University, Academics in Solidarity at Freie Universität Berlin, and the Philipp Schwartz Initiative by the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation.

DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to Dr. Sheila Ngoh Manka (1985-2024) in appreciation of her inspiring nature and commitment to our shared field of research, as well as her efforts in developing the academic community in Southern Africa. We are grateful for the opportunity to have collaborated with her.

Introduction

Two special sections of the IJSAF titled "The Food System in the (Post-)Pandemic World: Disruptions, Vulnerability, Resilience, and Alternatives 1 & 2" feature scholarly contributions that critically explore the complex relationship between the COVID-19 pandemic and the food system. Rather than treating COVID-19 as an isolated event, these sections situate it within a broader historical context of agrifood transformations shaped by intersecting crises related to the capitalist-industrial food system, ecology, and governance (cf. Altieri and Nicholls, 2020; Clapp and Moseley, 2020; van der Ploeg, 2020). The articles investigate how the disruptions triggered by the pandemic have intensified structural inequalities while simultaneously creating opportunities for alternative models of food production, distribution, consumption, and governance.

The contributions to these special sections were gathered from the ISA Research Committee on Sociology of Agriculture and Food (RC40) mini-conference, which took place at Leipzig University's Research Centre Global Dynamics in October 2022. Forty-six scholars from 37 different universities, research institutions, and social movements worldwide participated in the conference. They engaged in scholarly discussions regarding the sustainability of agrifood systems and the role of agrifood scholars in advancing food systems research and critical theory development in agrifood studies (see Bjørkhaug et al., 2023 for more details about the event). Drawing from the conference and the published articles, in this introduction, we examine what changes and alternative models emerged and how the existing model responded during the pandemic. We believe these discussions are crucial for understanding how COVID-19 has reshaped power relations within the agrifood system. Additionally, we explore how critical agrifood studies can contribute theoretically and methodologically to address the challenges posed by a crisis like COVID-19.

Disruptions, Vulnerabilities, and Adaptations: COVID-19 and Agrifood Systems

The COVID-19 pandemic exposed and exacerbated the vulnerabilities within global agrifood systems. It disrupted food production and supply chains, highlighted the precarious conditions faced by agricultural and food workers, and reinforced existing social inequalities (cf. FIAN, 2020; HLPE, 2021; IPES, 2020). As lockdowns and mobility restrictions were enforced, the fragility of industrial food networks became apparent, resulting in significant repercussions for food security, labour markets, and alternative food systems (FAO, 2020a, 2020b).

In the initial weeks of the pandemic, authorities worldwide opted to shut down communities and prevent opportunities for social gatherings. Borders were closed, and questions were raised about food deliveries due to both border crossings and also access to labour necessary to produce food or transport it to stores. Reports emerged from various countries highlighting slaughterhouses as clusters of infection and instances of facilities having to close down. As with agricultural labour, similar risks were associated with temporary and migrant workers.

The consumption sphere was not an exception to the concerns raised. One primary response of consumers was engaging in panic buying (Islam et al., 2021). For instance, a study in the Netherlands demonstrated significant growth in retail food shopping during the pandemic and predicted a general shift towards more home cooking and baking post-COVID (Zuokas et al., 2022).

In addition to the immediate panic, supply chain disruptions led to reduced imports and exports, affecting different regions in various ways (Massoud and Zoghi, 2024). Increased unemployment and economic instability impacted health and food security, particularly among vulnerable populations. A meta-study of publications related to COVID-19 highlighted weaknesses in the food system (Kafi et al., 2023). While Kafi et al. called for optimising conventional systems to enhance competitiveness, an important lesson learned was the shift towards shorter value chains and more sustainable, robust production and supply chains.

The relationship between COVID-19 and the capitalist-industrial food system is far more intricate than it

may initially appear. While agrifood relations have proved particularly vulnerable during the pandemic, the capital-driven, productivist food system is also among the primary contributors to the emergence and spread of pathogens that can lead to epidemics and pandemics. Therefore, it is also crucial to consider the debate surrounding the relationship between COVID-19 and zoonotic diseases. Wallace et al. (2020: 7) provide an extensive list of "recent emergent and reemergent farm and foodborne pathogens, originating from across the anthropogenic domain."

Several traits of the agrifood system contribute to this growing list, accelerating both "the evolution of pathogen virulence and their transmission" while also "removing natural constraints on their deadliness" (Wallace et al., 2020: 8). For example, the increasing standardisation of food production has led to "genetic monocultures," where "food animals and plants with nearly identical genomes" eliminate the natural disease barriers that genetic diversity typically provides (Wallace et al., 2020: 8). Another contributing factor is the constant drive to reduce slaughter ages – such as bringing the slaughter age of chickens down to just six weeks – favouring the selection of pathogens capable of surviving more robust immune systems. Additionally, the geographic expansion of live animal trade and export has increased the "diversity of genomic segments that their associated pathogens exchange," accelerating the rate at which disease agents evolve (Wallace et al., 2020: 8).

Furthermore, Molyneux et al. (2011: 1) state that at least 60% of human infectious diseases are caused by zoonotic pathogens. In FAO's (2017: 59) words, "more than 70% of the infectious diseases that have emerged in humans since the 1940s can be traced back to animals, including wildlife." Put differently, many novel human pathogens spill over from wild animals to local human communities before spreading globally. This includes SARS-CoV-2, the virus responsible for COVID-19 (Wallace et al., 2020: 6). Many scientists have pointed out that the emergence of SARS-CoV-2 was likely caused by multiple zoonotic transmissions linked to wildlife trading at the Huanan Market (Jiang and Wang, 2022). Particularly relevant to our discussion is that the agrifood system plays a central role in zoonotic spillover, mainly through agribusiness-led deforestation, the contraction and disruption of wildlife habitats, long supply chains, and the commercialisation of the wild/exotic food sector. COVID-19 seems to be not an exception.

Paradoxically, the very characteristics of the food system that contribute to the emergence and spread of such diseases also make agrifood relations among the most vulnerable during pandemics. As reflected in various reports that flourished from the early days of the pandemic onwards, COVID-19 brought unprecedented attention to its effects on food systems (e.g., FIAN, 2020; FSIN and Global Network Against Food Crises, 2020; HLPE, 2021; IPES, 2020; OECD, 2020a, 2020b). These studies, though from various and, at some points, contradictory standpoints, consistently highlighted the profound challenges affecting production, distribution, and consumption.

For instance, the HLPE (2021) detailed how COVID-19 strained food supply chains, leading to rising food insecurity and malnutrition. Meanwhile, the OECD (2020a, 2020b) emphasised how disruptions in production and distribution drove up food prices and reduced accessibility. The FIAN International (2020) report highlighted how COVID-19 intensified human rights violations, disproportionately affecting marginalised communities' access to adequate food. Similarly, the FSIN and Global Network Against Food Crises (2020) underscored how the pandemic has worsened food insecurity in already vulnerable regions, stressing the need for urgent international intervention.

A recurring theme across the reports was how the pandemic exacerbated existing inequalities and vulnerabilities within food systems, stimulating discussions on food policies and politics. In this regard, the IPES-Food (2020) report advocated for transformative solutions to build more sustainable and equitable food systems, addressing both the immediate crisis and its root causes. The HLPE (2021) echoed this call, arguing for policy interventions that enhance food system resilience to future disruptions. The OECD (2020a) further

recommended targeted measures to support farmers, stabilise food markets and ensure food security for all populations.

Despite these challenges, the crisis also highlighted the resilience present within agrifood networks. Actors and communities adapted to changing conditions through alternative provisioning models, strengthening community connections, and digital mobilisation. Scholars suggested that a crisis like the COVID-19 pandemic can create a window of opportunity for transformative changes in production systems, paving the way for more sustainable agricultural products, shorter food chains, and direct sales (Darnhofer, 2021). The emphasis on local and regional food systems helped mitigate some disruptions by shortening supply chains and enhancing community resilience. Given these conditions, the importance of integrating sustainability and resilience concepts within the food system to bolster supply chain resilience has been further highlighted (Haji and Himpel, 2024).

Furthermore, COVID-19 has not only highlighted the weaknesses and vulnerabilities of our agrifood system but has also acted as a catalyst for its digital transformation (Alam et al., 2023; Haji and Himpel, 2024; Massoud and Zoghi, 2024). As communities faced lockdowns, the reliance on digital platforms for various uses surged, including marketing and distribution. While this has raised concerns regarding the growing power of agrifood and tech corporations, grassroots movements and small-scale producers have also leveraged digital technologies to develop localised and community-driven food distribution models, challenging dominant agribusiness structures and promoting resilience.

Given these intricate relations between COVID-19 and agrifood relations, the two special sections, through nine articles, explore how the pandemic intensified systemic weaknesses while revealing possibilities for resilience and alternative approaches.

Rethinking Food Systems in Crisis: Key Themes and Insights from the Special Section Articles

The first special section (Bjørkhaug, et al., 2023) consists of four articles, and the second includes five. Together, these contributions revisit key themes in sociology of agriculture and food, emphasising the globalisation of agri-food systems, the reconfiguration of socio-ecological relationships, and the politics of agriculture and food. Additionally, they address the methodological and theoretical challenges posed by the pandemic, highlighting how these have influenced agri-food scholarship.

In the first paper of the first special section, Johannes Bhanye (2023) examines how the COVID-19 pandemic and restrictions on associational life impacted food security among Malawian migrants in the Lydiate informal settlement, Zimbabwe. Through ethnographic fieldwork, the study revealed that COVID-19 lockdown measures disrupted vital social support networks and exacerbated food insecurity among migrants already facing legal uncertainty, discrimination, and exclusion from formal aid systems. The pandemic led to job losses, food supply chain disruptions, limited access to essential services, and worsening mental health. Additionally, restrictions on social gatherings weakened communal ties, including religious groups and cultural associations like the Nyau cult, which traditionally provided emotional and material support. Bhanye discusses how migrants develop "nimble ways of belonging", such as virtual support networks, to maintain resilience in crises. The study calls for policy interventions to support migrants, such as financial aid, strengthened social protection, and improved essential services.

Sohini Bhattacharjee (2023) examines how organic farmers in Delhi NCR, India, navigated the disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic by turning to short food supply chains and direct selling initiatives. The study highlights how reliance on conventional agrifood networks became a liability during the crisis, pushing farmers to establish closer ties with consumers through alternative food networks (AFNs). By emphasising the role of geographical and relational proximity, the article explores how farmers adapted to shifting market

dynamics, leveraging flexibility and community trust to sustain their livelihoods and increase farmers' resilience to systemic shocks such as pandemics. While these initiatives demonstrated resilience, the study also reveals the challenges of scaling up such models in the face of structural barriers. Bhattacharjee's work contributes to debates on food system transformations, showcasing how crises can accelerate shifts toward localised and decentralised food networks.

Atakan Büke and his colleagues (2023) examine the resilience of Istanbul's fresh fruit and vegetable wholesale markets during the COVID-19 pandemic, highlighting how food provisioning continued despite initial expectations of disruption. The study attributes this resilience not to systemic robustness but to weak regulatory enforcement and the agility of market actors who swiftly adapted by redirecting supplies through alternative channels. The authors critique the neoliberal resilience framing by discussing the structural problems faced by the wholesale markets, such as inadequate cold storage and traffic issues, which were exacerbated but not caused by the pandemic. They argue that it often reinforces existing power structures rather than fostering equitable food systems. The study raises critical questions about the long-term implications of unregulated resilience in urban food systems by exposing how crisis responses in food provisioning rely on informal market adaptations rather than structured policy interventions.

In the final article in the first special section, Lea Loretta Zentgraf and Thalita Kalix Garcia (2023) investigate how food movements in Germany adapted to the COVID-19 crisis by leveraging digital tools for mobilisation and collective action. The study highlights how digital communication facilitated new forms of activism, enabling food movements to sustain engagement despite physical restrictions by focusing on the Wir haben es satt! Campaign and Slow Food Germany. Analysing these movements at three levels (actor, action, and transformation), the authors show how digital and hybrid repertoires of protest helped strengthen networks advocating for socio-ecological food system change. While the new digital repertoires enabled these movements to broaden their reach, increase visibility, and strengthen their political influence, contributing to the ongoing transformation of the food system in Germany, the study also raises questions about the long-term effectiveness of online activism. With this, Zentgraf and Garcia contribute to broader discussions on the intersection of food politics, digital activism, and collective resistance in times of crisis.

In the first article of the second section, Yıldız Atasoy (2024) focuses on Turkey's state-led agro-industrial expansion. Atasoy illustrates how pandemic-related supply-chain disruptions worsened existing inequalities, particularly affecting small-scale farmers and racialised migrant labourers. The state-planned agro-industrialisation prioritising export-oriented monocultures and supermarket-driven standardisation increased dependence on precarious labour and imported inputs, exposing the system to shocks. The article underscores how industrial agriculture's structural inequalities – land commodification, labour exploitation, and environmental degradation – create ongoing crises despite being framed as a solution to food insecurity. Hilde Bjørkhaug and Jostein Brobakk (2024) examine Norway's reliance on migrant seasonal workers during the pandemic. Despite assurances of food security, the government's decision to exempt agricultural labour from border closures highlighted the industry's dependence on an underpaid, racialised workforce. The paper critiques how policies framed as temporary responses concealed the structural precarity of neoliberal agrifood systems. By treating migrant labour as both essential and disposable, Norway's pandemic response reflects contradictions in a system that sustains vulnerabilities while claiming resilience.

In the third article of the second special section, Sheila Ngoh Manka and Mokong Simon Mapadimeng (2024) analyse the socio-cultural and nutritional resilience of indigenous food systems in Cameroon. The study reveals that the Mankon people hold indigenous foods in high regard for their health benefits and cultural meanings. Manka and Mapadimeng argue that indigenous foods offer an alternative to industrial models, however, a generational knowledge gap threatens long-term sustainability. This study critiques colonial and industrial agriculture's encroachment on traditional practices, weakening ecological and cultural diversity while undermining food sovereignty.

Esra Demirkol Colosio and Valerio Colosio (2024) investigate in their article how grassroots solidarity economy associations in Ankara responded to the food price crisis triggered by COVID-19 and compounded by economic instability. The article situates these associations within broader struggles for food sovereignty and democracy, emphasising their role in resisting the commodification of food and mitigating the weaknesses of neoliberal agri-business. By fostering direct producer-consumer relationships and adopting agroecological practices, these associations not only provided alternative food sources but also emerged as sites of political resistance against an increasingly fragile food regime. The study underscores the potential of these associations to influence urban food policies and promote food democracy. However, the authors also point to structural constraints that limit the expansion of these grassroots initiatives, raising questions about their long-term viability in a system shaped by neoliberal policies.

In the final article of the two sections, Larissa da Silva Araujo (2024) presents an alternative to the industrial model by examining the resilience of agroecological producers in Ecuador's Kayambi communities. The study highlights how principles of solidarity and reciprocity emerge as crucial safety nets when capitalist structures fail to secure food access. Confronted with disruptions in conventional distribution networks, Kayambi farmers decentralised their markets, diversified their crops, and strengthened community-based food systems, demonstrating agroecology's potential for agricultural reconstruction and post-pandemic recovery. The article also explores how crisis-driven transformations reinforced political agroecology both as a practical and ideological response to industrial food system failures.

Discussion

As the contributions in these special sections demonstrate once again, the COVID-19 lockdowns resulted in market closures, mobility restrictions, and job losses in the informal economy, significantly impacting food access (Bhanye, 2023). Conventional agrifood supply chains were disrupted (Bhattacharjee, 2023), especially those with extended ones reliant on transportation and intermediaries (Büke et al., 2023), as well as on migrant labour (Bhanye, 2023; Bjørkhaug and Brobakk, 2024). This disruption led to unprecedented increases in agro-industrial input and food prices (Atasoy, 2024). Government-imposed lockdowns caused logistical breakdowns and limited market access (Bhattacharjee, 2023; Araujo, 2024). Fears of food shortages were anticipated to worsen existing food insecurities and vulnerabilities, prompting public concerns about food availability and prices (Demirkol Colosio and Colosio, 2024; Manka and Mapadimeng, 2024; Zentgraf and Garcia, 2024). These issues underscored inequalities and injustices in food production and access (Büke, 2024). The disruptions caused by COVID-19 revealed the fragility of the global agri-food system and highlighted underlying structural problems (Atasoy, 2024). These problems are partly attributed to government interventions in favour of industrial and commercial agriculture (Atasoy, 2024) and the prioritisation of food security over worker protections (Bjørkhaug and Brobakk, 2024).

Contributions to the special sections highlight how the industrial food regime's dependence on exploitation, standardisation, and marginalisation deepens instability, even as communities and smaller-scale systems demonstrate adaptability, exposing the contradictions within the industrial food system around the globe. For instance, and considering particularly this second special section, while the Cameroonian and Ecuadorian cases provide examples of food systems that emphasise sustainability and cultural continuity but remain vulnerable to industrial encroachment, Türkiye and Norway, despite their different economic and geographic contexts, illustrate how industrial models rely on labour exploitation and environmental depletion, making them susceptible to crises. Although presenting unfolding different dynamics contingent on local contexts, articles from both issues engage with the tension between resilience and fragility. Indigenous and agroecological practices demonstrate the potential of decentralised, community-driven food systems, while industrial agriculture's reliance on precarious labour and global supply chains amplifies risk. In this context, the pandemic serves as a lens for understanding both the weaknesses of capitalist-industrial frameworks and the possibilities for alternative approaches that prioritise equity, sustainability, and local agency.

In sum, these contributions collectively highlight the long-standing weaknesses in the food system amid the new ones that the COVID-19 pandemic created. The industrial model's pursuit of efficiency and profit – through standardisation, labour exploitation, and ecological simplification – has made it vulnerable to shocks while contributing to systemic instability. However, the different cases from different parts of the world suggest that alternatives based on tradition, solidarity, and autonomy offer promising pathways toward more stable and just food systems. By centring these dynamics, these special sections invite scholars and policymakers to rethink food systems that are not only resilient in crises but also equitable and regenerative in daily practice.

Concluding Remarks: Moving Beyond the Crisis and Recovery Narratives

The contributions in these special sections highlight the complexities of how agrifood systems responded to the pandemic, moving beyond simplistic narratives of crisis or recovery. They challenge the idea of an all-powerful capitalist food system while avoiding overly optimistic portrayals of alternative food networks. By focusing on tangible struggles and adaptations, these studies underscore the need to analyse how structural vulnerabilities impact the capacities of different actors to respond to crises. The pandemic did not merely expose weaknesses in agrifood systems; it also revealed how these systems were actively reconfigured in ways that reinforced existing inequalities while simultaneously enabling new forms of resistance and adaptation.

In this regard, a significant strength of this collection lies in its diverse methodological and theoretical approaches, mainly through ethnographic and qualitative research. Unlike much research that has focused on the quantifiable effects of COVID-19 on the food system – such as production and distribution volumes or geographical changes – this collection emphasises the lived experiences of small farmers, migrant workers, and grassroots food movements. Doing so provides a grounded understanding of the multiple and intersecting crises at play. Additionally, it offers a counterpoint to dominant agrifood policy discourses, which often rely on macro-level analyses while overlooking the everyday realities faced by those most affected by disruptions in the food system.

The studies in the special sections suggest a number of theoretically stimulating concepts that can be further developed in future studies. "Nimble ways of belonging" (Bhanye, 2023) is one such example, explaining migrants' adaptation strategies in times of intensified crisis and can be extended to agrifood studies in informal economies. Another is 'Afro-sensed-' (Manka and Mapadimeng, 2024), which emphasises the importance of Africans' appreciation and understanding of their pre-colonial modes of production and systems of livelihoods. Combined with Araujo's (2024) suggestion to integrate decolonial and abolitionist approaches to agroecology, these contributions link critical agrifood studies to decolonial knowledge production.

Furthermore, several contributions in these two special sections link economic and moral perspectives in specific production methods, such as agroecology, and natural science-based concepts, such as resilience. They advocate going beyond a neutral understanding of resilience. Instead of treating resilience as an inherently positive attribute of agrifood systems, these studies scrutinise the power dynamics determining whose resilience is prioritised and at what cost. As several contributions illustrate, resilience can justify the maintenance of exploitative labour relations while reinforcing precarious food security arrangements and legitimising neoliberal governance strategies that externalise the burden of adaptation solely on already structurally affected communities. Büke et al.'s (2023) critical discussion on the concept of neoliberal resilience in the context of Istanbul's fresh fruit and vegetable provision systems is a case in point. These discussions extend and strengthen our interdisciplinary research tradition while enabling us to refine critical interrogations of agrifood relations.

It is essential to recognise that there is an ideological intent in stressing the quality of resilience amid socio-economic disruptions. Especially when those being constantly called resilient are often sustaining a life marked by coerced exploitation. In other words, resilience could thus be used to divert attention from exploitative

practices. As Fisher & Jones (2023, 186) poignantly point out, resilience has become a buzzword before and after the pandemic: "By empathising personal strengths and internal resources, the dominant discourse around resilience places the responsibility of 'recovery' (another weasel word) with the individual. This aligns with neoliberal ideologies, which promotes individualism and self-reliance." Looking ahead, agrifood scholarship must be vigilant about the long-term consequences of these transformations, ensuring that resilience is not framed as a depoliticised concept but rather as a site of contestation and power struggle within the global food system.

Finally, the contributions in these two special sections stress the importance of perspectives that connect food studies with literature on, yet not exclusively, labour, social movements, migration, indigenous communities, everyday life, digitalisation, decoloniality, and environmental justice. By integrating these fields, they highlight the interconnected nature of agrifood struggles and the need to understand food systems not merely as economic networks but as sites of social, political, and ecological contestation. Future research in agrifood scholarship should continue to develop these intersections, ensuring that analyses of food systems remain attuned to broader questions of power, justice, and sustainability.

References

Alam GMM, Khatun MN, Sarker MNI, Joshi NP and Bhandari H (2023) Promoting agri-food systems resilience through ICT in developing countries amid COVID-19. *Frontiers in Sustainable Food Systems* 6: 1-14.

Altieri MA and Nicholls CI (2020) Agroecology and the reconstruction of a post-COVID-19 agriculture. *The Journal of Peasant Studies* 47(5): 881–898.

Araujo LS (2024) What is left after the pandemic? Solidarity and Reciprocity amongst Kayambi agroecological producers during COVID-19. *The International Journal of Sociology of Agriculture and Food* 30(1).

Atasoy Y (2024) Blame Covid-19 and Ignore the Long History of Industrial Standardisation in Agriculture: Supermarket and GLOBALG.A.P. Standards, Exploitation of Migrant/Refugee Farmworkers, and Marginalisation of Small-Scale Farmers in Turkey. *The International Journal of Sociology of Agriculture and Food* 30(1): 47–67.

Bhanye J (2023) From Banned Bonds to Hungry Homes: Impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and bans on associational life on food security among migrants on the margins. *The International Journal of Sociology of Agriculture and Food* 29(2): 39–60.

Bhattacharjee S (2023) From Farmer to Consumer: Exploring Proximity and Direct Selling Initiatives of Organic Farmers of Delhi NCR During COVID-19. *The International Journal of Sociology of Agriculture and Food* 29(2): 61–81.

Bjørkhaug H, Büke A, Ribeiro JD and Sippel SR (2023) The Food System in the (Post-)Pandemic World: Disruptions, Vulnerability, Resilience, and Alternatives - 1. *The International Journal of Sociology of Agriculture and Food* 29(2): 35–37.

Bjørkhaug H and Brobakk J (2024) Exceptional policies for exceptional situations? How COVID-19 revealed persisting precarity for seasonal migrant workers. *The International Journal of Sociology of Agriculture and Food* 30(1): 69–87.

Büke A, Tatari MF and Doğan O (2023) COVID-19 and the Neoliberal Resilience of Food Provision in Istanbul: Non-Regulation and Agility in the Fruit and Vegetable Wholesale Markets. *The International Journal of Sociology of Agriculture and Food* 29(2): 83–103.

Clapp J and Moseley WG (2020) This food crisis is different: COVID-19 and the fragility of the neoliberal food security order. *The Journal of Peasant Studies* 47(7): 1393–1417.

Darnhofer I (2021) Resilience or how do we enable agricultural systems to ride the waves of unexpected change? *Agricultural Systems* 187: 1-5.

Demirkol Colosio E and Colosio V (2024) Grassroots food initiatives at the rural-urban interface: Potential and constraints in Ankara. *The International Journal of Sociology of Agriculture and Food* 30(1): 105–120.

FAO (2020a) Policy responses to keep input markets flowing in times of COVID-19. Available at: http://www.fao.org/3/ca8979en/CA8979EN.pdf (accessed 8 August 2024).

FAO (2020b) Legal mechanisms to contribute to safe and secured food supply chains in times of COVID-19. Available at: https://www.fao.org/3/ca9121en/CA9121EN.pdf (accessed 8 August 2024).

FAO (2017) *The future of food and agriculture: Trends and challenges*. Rome.

FIAN (2020) Impact of Covid-19 on the Human Right to Food and Nutrition: Preliminary Monitoring Report. Available at: https://www.fian.org/files/files/Preliminary_monitoring_report_-_Impact_of_COVID19_on_the_HRtFN.pdf (accessed 13 August 2024).

FSIN and Global Network Against Food Crises (2020) Global Report on Food Crises 2020 September update: in times of COVID-19. Available at: https://www.fsinplatform.org/global-report-food-crises-2020 (accessed 15 August 2024).

Fisher J and Jones E (2023) The problem with resilience. *International Journal of Mental Health Nursing* 33(1): 185-188.

Haji M and Himpel F (2004) Building Resilience in Food Security: Sustainable Strategies Post-COVID-19. *Sustainability* 16(995). https://doi.org/10.3390/su16030995

HLPE (2021) Impacts of COVID-19 on food security and nutrition: developing effective policy responses to address the hunger and malnutrition pandemic. Available at: https://openknowledge.fao.org/server/api/core/bitstreams/0b6045e6-ebe8-4569-b383-eafdc51b27f8/content (accessed 15 August 2024)

IPES (2020) COVID-19 and the crisis in food systems: Symptoms, causes, and potential solutions. Available at: https://www.ipes-food.org/_img/upload/files/COVID-19_CommuniqueEN%283%29.pdf (accessed 24 August 2024).

Islam T, Pitafi AH, Arya V, Wang Y, Akhtar N, Mubarik S, and Xiaobei L (2021) Panic buying in the COVID-19 pandemic: a multi-country examination. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services* 59, 102357. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jretconser.2020.102357.

Jiang X and Wang R (2022) Wildlife trade is likely the source of SARS-CoV-2: Multiple transmissions from wildlife at a market in Wuhan probably led to SARS-CoV-2 emergence. *Science* 377(6609): 925-926.

Kafi A, Zainuddin N and Saifudin A (2023) Meta-analysis of food supply chain: pre, during and post COVID-19 pandemic. *Agriculture & Food Security* 12(27)(2023): 1-22.

Manka SN and Mapadimeng MS (2024) The State of Indigenous Foods in Africa: The case of Mankon Community in the Northwest Region of Cameroon. *The International Journal of Sociology of Agriculture and Food* 30(1): 89–104.

Massoud R and Zoghi A (2024) The effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on food systems: limitations and opportunities. *Discover Food* 4:(102), https://doi.org/10.1007/s44187-024-00183-8

Molyneux D, Hallaj Z, Keusch GT, McManus DP, Ngowi H, Cleaveland S, Ramos-Jimenez P, Gotuzzo E, Kar K, Sanchez A, Garba A, Carabin A, Bassili A, Chaignat CL, Meslin FX, Abushama HM, Willingham AL and Kioy D (2020) Zoonoses and marginalised infectious diseases of poverty: Where do we stand?. *Parasites and Vectors* 4(106): 1-6.

OECD (2020a) COVID-19 and the Food and Agriculture Sector: Issues and Policy Responses. Available at: https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/2020/04/covid-19-and-the-food-and-agriculture-sector-issues-and-policy-responses_02cb65e9.html (accessed 24 August 2024).

OECD (2020b) COVID-19 and Global Food Systems. Available at: https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/covid-19-and-global-food-systems_aeb1434b-en.html (accessed 24 August 2024).

van der Ploeg, J. D. (2020). From biomedical to politico-economic crisis: the food system in times of Covid-19. The Journal of Peasant Studies, 47(5), 944–972. https://doi.org/10.1080/03066150.2020.1794843

Wallace R, Liebman A, Chaves LF and Wallace R (2020) COVID-19 and Circuits of Capital. *Monthly Review* 72(1).

Zentgraf LL and Kalix Garcia T (2023) Food Movements, Resistance, and new digital repertoires in (post-)pandemic times. *The International Journal of Sociology of Agriculture and Food* 29(2): 105–128.

Zuokas D, Gul E, and Lim A (2022) How did COVID-19 change what people buy: Evidence from a supermarket chain. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services* 68(103010): 1-14.

Blame Covid-19 and Ignore the Long History of Industrial Standardisation in Agriculture: Supermarket and GLOBALG.A.P. Standards, Exploitation of Migrant/Refugee Farmworkers, and Marginalisation of Small-Scale Farmers in Turkey

Paper first received: 15 November 2023; Accepted: 31 May 2024; Published in final form: 20 August 2024
https://doi.org/10.48416/ijsaf.v30i1.561

Yıldız ATASOY[1]

Abstract

This paper examines the resilience of small-scale farmers in Turkey who are facing an expanding industrial model in agriculture that is deepening the structural conditions of marginalisation and exclusion. This type of model is vulnerable to supply-chain disruptions due to various world-historical conjunctures, including the Covid-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine, resulting in unprecedent hikes in agro-industrial-input and market-food prices, as well as food insecurity. Drawing on official documents and pre-pandemic interviews, the paper situates the resilience of these farmers within the state-planned expansion of agro-industrialisation directed towards boosting market- and export-based earnings. This industrial model is based on imported agro-inputs, land commodification, and contraction of village resources, as well as registration and standardisation as a condition for market access. It is further characterised by racially segmented agricultural labour markets, and exclusion of unregistered farmers and their food. The paper explores the structural constraints that emerge from an expanding industrialisation in agriculture, and considers how small-scale farmers might adapt to these conditions while co-existing with agro-industrialisation.

[1] Department of Sociology and Anthropology, Simon Fraser University, Canada

Corresponding author: Yıldız Atasoy, yatasoy@sfu.ca

Biographical note

Yıldız Atasoy is Professor of Sociology, Simon Fraser University (SFU)ö Associate Faculty Member of the School for International Studies, SFU, and Associate Faculty Member of the Department of Geography, SFU

Dr. Atasoy served as Director of the Center for Sustainable Development, Faculty of Environment, at SFU.

Dr. Atasoy's published books include: Commodification of Global Agrifood Systems and Agro-Ecology (2017) (self-authored); Islam's Marriage with Neoliberalism (2009) (self-authored); Turkey, Islamists and Democracy (2005) (self-authored); Global Economic Crisis and the Politics of Diversity (2013) (self-edited); Hegemonic Transitions, the State and Crisis in Neoliberal Capitalism (2009) (self-edited); Global Shaping and Its Alternatives (2003) (co-edited with Bill Carroll).

INTRODUCTION

Covid-19 related social-distancing requirements, lockdowns, and transport restrictions have exposed the fragility of the global agri-food system. Although regional variation has been evident across the world, the most immediate impacts were: failures in the supply of seeds, feeds, and fertilisers; food-price hikes; fewer choices in and access to market food; food loss/waste on farms due to inability to harvest; and wage loss and disruptions to farm employment (e.g., UNCSN, 2020). The enduring impacts remain unclear, requiring a burden of proof to establish cause-and-effect relationships. This is not my goal here.

Existing research examines the Covid-19 effect on global agri-food in relation to labour productivity and production output through the lens of un/availability of farmworkers due to illness and migration restrictions (e.g., Haqiqi & Horeh, 2021). To avoid the risk of labour shortages, such research tends to suggest the adoption of digital technologies and biotechnologically improved crop varieties (e.g., Henry, 2020). 'Producing more food with less farming' is emphasised and further justified by fears of future food insecurity due to pandemics and population growth. An interesting research question emerges as to the growing prevalence of a perspective centred on high-tech-led productivity/yield optimisation in response to future supply-chain disruptions, but *without* examining its long-term effects on small-scale peasant-like farmers who continue producing food for local/regional consumption.

To get a better idea of the increasing predominance of market-oriented productivity/yield optimisation and its consequences for small-scale farmers, I adopt a big-picture approach to agri-food restructuring which the Covid-19 pandemic has only accelerated. Research shows that the global agri-food system was 'broken' long before the pandemic as regards its consequences for small producers. This can be traced back to the market- and export-oriented restructuring of global agricultures occurring since the 1980s under the World Bank's 'new agriculture' programme and the founding of the WTO in 1995 (Clapp & Moseley, 2020; McMichael, 2023). The pandemic became a 'revealer' of underlying structural problems within the industrial agri-food system. As a result of standardisation in production methods, crop varieties, agro-chemical and agro-industrial input use, and commercialisation of land, it has created significant vulnerabilities in small-scale food production.

Research on Covid-19's impact on agriculture in Turkey has often assumed, rather than demonstrated, widespread supply-chain disruptions. However, there is lack of comparative analysis on the *varied* and *combined* effects of various world-historical conjunctures, including the pandemic, the war in Ukraine, government's inflationary monetary policy, and climate change. These conjunctures are often 'added' to a list of factors in accounting for supply-chain disruptions (e.g., Urak, 2023). Some scholars also examine pandemic effects in relation to farmers' anxieties about the increasing cost of, and access to, inputs (e.g., Uğur & Buruklar, 2022), calling for reduced import-dependency on grain crops (Urak, 2023; Özden et al., 2022)[1]. Such research often ignores the political-economic history of agricultural restructuring along an industrial model premised on the marginalisation and exclusion of small-scale farmers. My belief is that in Turkey, pandemic-induced supply-chain disruptions were neither long-term, nor permanent, nor uniform across agri-food relationships and scale of farming. The neglect of agricultural restructuring is surprising, especially in light of existing research which shows that a neoliberal, market-oriented developmentalist model (which began in Turkey in the 1980s) created the structural conditions for farmers' exclusion, marginalisation, and dispossession (Atasoy, 2017; Aydın, 2002; 2010; Gürel, 2011; Karataşlı & Kumral, 2023; Keyder & Yenal, 2011; Öztürk, et al., 2018) – long before the pandemic.

This paper highlights the structural constraints generated for small-scale farmers, while keeping in mind recent findings by Atasoy (2023a) showing that these farmers continue to produce market food, as they do in many places across the world (Harriss-White, 2023; Jansen, 2015; Lewison, 2022). Thus, this paper asks: How do we make sense of the structural constraints arising from an expanding process of industrialisation

[1]Turkey, which is not self-sufficient in wheat, barley, and corn-seed crops, imports grain from Russia and Ukraine.

in agriculture? How do farmers adapt to these conditions? What, if anything, does Covid-19 have to do with this context?

The question of how small-scale farmers endure has been a subject of extensive research, which shows that smaller-scale agroecologically oriented farming *can* be more productive and resilient (Akram-Lodhi, 2021; Mosely & Battersby, 2020). In general, it is difficult to assess the resilience of farming at larger scales – resilience being the ability of a system to withstand shocks and overcome disturbances while retaining its basic features (Walker et al., 2006). This includes the 'adaptability' that a system can sustain by reforming itself through the reconfiguring of old elements and the combining of new ones. My aim here is not to demonstrate how small-scale farmers continue farming within agro-industrialisation. Rather, I am concerned with the issue of their adaptability through a historical understanding of the structural constraints that arise from market-oriented agricultural restructuring. My particular interest is in small-scale farmers' options emerging from *within* these constraints. Farmers in Turkey do not formulate these options through a grassroots agroecological mobilisation *against* the industrial model (Atasoy 2023a; cf. Holt-Gimenez & Altieri, 2013), *but as actors situated within it*. They practice a mixture of customary and industrial production methods, thus constituting dynamic elements in the expansion of commercial relations. These farmers *may not know* the meaning of the term agroecology, but they are highly knowledgeable about the agroecological conditions of their farming, and their practices are rooted in tacit, experiential knowledge acquired over generations. They use natural resources and customary conservation methods to maintain soil productivity; blend elements of customary farming with selective use of industrial inputs; and feed themselves while also producing food for sale in local/regional markets. They simultaneously *co-exist* alongside the large-scale capitalist processes that deepen industrial agriculture. In an effort to understand the conditions in which these farmers operate, I first offer a broad description of expanding standard industrial agriculture since the early 2000s.

Structural constraints arising from the processes of state-led agro-industrialisation include: 1- expansion of a large-scale commercial agriculture with an emphasis on efficiency/productivity optimisation through land commodification, extended industrial inputs, and bio-digital precision-agriculture technologies; 2- standardisation of agriculture in compliance with private-sector supermarket standards; 3- increase of racialisation and exploitation in labour relations within commercial agriculture; and 4- exclusion of unregistered farmers from formally established markets. Farmers' options are *determined within* these processes. Farmers of different scales and production/marketing trajectories adapt to changing contexts in their different ways. Large-scale commercial farmers are dependent on high-cost, high-tech industrial input and hired labour for specialised, standard monoculture production of high-value crops; they have little room to manoeuvre, other than by deepening labour exploitation. Small-scale farmers adapt through their use of some industrial methods, application of animal manure, reliance on unpaid labour of family members, and closer cooperation with one another and consumers, allowing them to *co-exist* with the dominant industrial model while situated within an expanding economic sphere of informalisation. Thus, the paper focuses on the structural conditions of agri-food in Turkey which the state periodically reorganises, along with resulting inequalities and farmers' adaptation options.

Two types of data were used in this research: information gathered from publicly available official documents and statistics, and information gathered from pre-pandemic fieldwork and interviews conducted in the Harmancık village of Beypazarı in the summer months between 2018 and 2021. I use the first type of data to describe the first three processes of agro-industrialisation described above, and the associated structural constraints on farmers. Beypazarı has experienced a 6.3% increase in agricultural lands in recent years (TÜİK, nd), manifested in the expansion of large-scale specialised production of lettuce, spinach, and carrot varieties for supermarket chains, export, and industrial processing. This expansion pulls in migrant workers. A large proportion of Ankara's 179 GAP-certified farmers operate in Beypazarı (MAF, 2022b). Agriculture in Beypazarı also consists of a significant number of small-scale farmers. I conducted my interviews in Harmancık in order to visit both large- and small-scale farms, and gain access to migrant/refugee farmworkers. My interviews

were open-ended, in-depth, and based on extended conversations held on the farms. The large-scale farmer I interviewed in Harmancık is one of the central figures in agro-industrialisation in Beypazarı. He produces carrot and lettuce varieties for supermarket chains and export, and employs Syrian refugees to reduce his labour costs. In total, I interviewed 23 Syrian refugee workers, one Kurdish seasonal-migrant worker, three labour contractors, and four farmers (one large-scale and three small-scale). My interviews with small-scale farmers relied on their willingness to talk to me; all of them gave their verbal consent to be interviewed. Small-scale farmers are all unregistered vegetable farmers who sell their produce on informal markets, and none of them has employed hired labour.

In what follows I describe the broad picture of agro-industrialisation expanding in tandem with high-tech 'precision agriculture'. This picture points to a growing emphasis on bio-digital precision-agriculture technologies for food-system predictability in the aftermath of the Covid-19 pandemic. Although there is a lack of systemic research on the effects of the pandemic on agriculture, this section underscores that there is an increasing push for leveraging the prospect of possible agri-food disruptions that could emanate from future pandemics, military conflicts, or climate change, to build a standardised high-tech agriculture. In this part of my analysis, I show that this push for standardisation results in growing dependency on imported industrial inputs, increased costs, land commodification, diminished access to locally available natural resources, and class-based food insecurity. I explore this through an analysis of GLOBALG.A.P., national GAP (good agricultural practices), and supermarkets' own private standards. Expanding on this understanding, I add that large-scale farmers' adaptation to the price/cost pressures of industrial agriculture relies on the availability of racialised migrant/refuge farmworkers and highly exploitative labour practices. I then examine how agro-standardisation exacerbates structural constraints on small-scale farming and deepens their marginalisation and exclusion. I raise the question of how these farmers might respond to these constraints and continue to produce market food. In the conclusion, I review my findings, noting that the Covid-19 pandemic afforded an opportunity to deepen industrial standardisation through high-tech precision agriculture.

Big Picture: Agro-industrial standardisation

In response to the Covid-19 pandemic, the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry (MAF) immediately undertook several policy initiatives to supply farmers with seeds and fertilisers, expand e-agriculture platforms and farmers' internet access, and provide hygiene training for agricultural workers. Moreover, while social distancing, quarantine, and travel restrictions were implemented for longer periods in many European countries, Turkey did not impose lasting restrictions. A curfew was imposed for a limited period for those under 20 and over 65 years of age. However, the pandemic provided an opportunity for the government to intensify its efforts to launch new agro-industrial projects, including 'climate-smart agriculture and competitive agricultural growth' in 2022 – financed by the World Bank (MAF, 2023: 296). The government has also intensified its efforts to disseminate information on various high-tech 'agricultural innovations' to farmers through print and video documents. It published 8,820 such documents in 2022 alone (MAF, 2023: 146). The MAF's (2024) 2024-2028 strategic plan focuses on productivity/yield maximisation as a response to future food insecurity due to climate-change, natural disasters, future pandemics, and wars. The 106-page document mentions Covid-19 only once and the word epidemic/pandemic five times.

The MAF positions its productivity/yield maximisation plan on a continuum of agro-industrialisation – a recurring theme since the 1930s. Over the years, agro-industrialisation shifted from its early focus on surplus production for national consumption and in support of national economic development during the statist era of the 1930s and the import-substituting era of the 1960s-70s, to a focus on production for distant consumers through export-oriented production from the 1980s-90s, and increased incorporation into global supply chains from the 2000s. The efficiency-via-industrialisation principle for increasing productivity of labour and yields to enlarge market earnings has been a constant. Since the early 2000s, expanded agro-industrialisation has occurred within the context of a state-led neoliberal restructuring of the economy (e.g., Atasoy, 2017;

Aydın, 2010). The associated dynamics of this restructuring in agriculture include: growing standardisation, dependency on imported agro-industrial inputs, increased costs, land commodification, and diminished access to locally available natural resources. Currently, agro-industrialisation appears to be entrenched within the pandemic-induced mindset of market-oriented productivity/yield optimisation in agriculture.

Restructuring entails greater use of industrial inputs of synthetic fertiliser, pesticides, herbicides, and hybrid/engineered seeds, along with farm machinery, to increase yields of specialised crops (Atasoy, 2023a: 5). The enactment of at least 15 different laws since the 2000s has enabled the government to reorganise agriculture as an importing and exporting sector that relies on corporate-agro-industrial/biotech inputs, supermarket chains, and finance capital (Atasoy, 2017; Aydın, 2010). The AKP government, in power since 2002, is currently pushing for the 'integration of agriculture and industry' through contract farming to produce raw materials for industry (Hazine ve Maliye Bakanlığı, 2022: 45) – a push that would relegate agri-food in Turkey to 'industrial appropriation' for agro-fuel, animal feed, and processed food production (for the concept, see: Goodman et al., 1987). In what follows I elaborate on the processes of commercialisation in agriculture that produce the conditions for dispossession dynamics.

Dispossession through land commercialisation, declining natural resources, high-priced imported agro-inputs, and increasing food insecurity

The state's reconfiguring of access to, exclusion from, and claims over common resources, and the reorganisation of land-property relations underpin 'dispossession' dynamics in agriculture (Peluso & Lund, 2011). This reconfiguring encompasses an expansion of lands for large-scale industrial farming, a decline in small-scale traditional crop-producing lands and access to village natural resources, and alterations in customary land-use relations. These changes are central to the 'agrarian question' (e.g., Bernstein, 2010; McMichael, 2023) implicated in the commercialisation of agriculture and associated effects on marginalisation, exclusion, and dissolution of small-scale food production.

In Turkey, there has been a decline in the share of arable land from 59% in 2000 to 52% in 2019 (MAF, 2021: 44). There has also been a decline in low-value traditional grain and food-crop production on rain-fed dry lands and hilly plots, and an increasing diversion of small-scale farmlands to large-scale commercial monoculture production of high-value crops (Atasoy 2023a; Aydın, 2010; Öztürk et al., 2018). Between 2001 and 2020, the low-value traditional grain-sown areas decreased by 12.8%, while the area used for high-value fruits, beverage and spice crops increased 36.4% (MAF, 2021: 23). Areas sown with corn and sunflowers for industrial oilseed have also increased by 165% and 192% respectively (TÜİK, 2023f). These changes have been accompanied by a decline in small-scale farmlands of less than 10 ha. Nevertheless, small-scale farmers, a significant number of whom farm on less than two hectares of land, still account for 80.7% of all agricultural holdings, although they operate on only 29.1% of agricultural land (TÜİK, 2018; MAF, 2021: 23).[2]

On the other hand, there has been an expansion of public lands through various land-reclamation, cadastral work, and land-consolidation schemes. The state brokers these newly reclaimed public lands for commercial projects. There are at least 11 different laws in Turkey providing a legal basis for the treasury to lease, sell, and donate public lands for commercial use in agriculture, housing, mining, and infrastructural projects (Atasoy, 2017; Tuğal, 2023). Approximately 90% of public lands are registered as state owned (Milli Emlak [National Real Estate], 2023: 49). In 2021 there was a 6.75% increase in the number of parcels and a 14.44% increase in the area of public lands registered as state-owned, compared to 2020 levels. This continued in 2022 with a 4.5% increase in the number of parcels and 3.27% in km² from 2021 levels (Milli Emlak, 2023: 49-50). The government is currently working to open an additional 3,500,000 parcels and 60,000 km² of these lands for commercial deals (Milli Emlak, 2023: 49).[3] This process involves a decline in previously open-access rural lands

[2] Only 6.4% of farms in Turkey have 20 ha of land (MAF, 2021: 13).

[3] Because there are inconsistencies in official statistics, I do not offer data on the government sale/lease of public lands.

customarily used for small-scale low-value grain-crop farming.

Changes in metropolitan municipality laws constitute another link in the series of state-led reorganisation of land use/access relations that have diminished farming capacity in previously rural areas. These changes include Law No 3030 legislated in 1984, Law No 5216 legislated in 2004, Law No 6360 in 2012, and Law No 5747 in 2018. As a result, in 2014, almost half of all existing municipalities and villages, and 77.4% of the population in Turkey found themselves included within metropolitan areas (Ministry of Interior, 2015: 15). In 2022, 94.76% of the population was located within municipal boundaries (Ministry of Environment, Urbanisation, and Climate Change [MEUCC], 2023: 32). Legislative changes have impinged significantly on the legal status of formerly unregistered open-access village farmlands used by farmers to grow cereal/food crops, and meadows and pastures customarily managed as village commons, thereby creating opportunities for the state to register them as state-owned immovables. This has in turn produced the legal groundwork for dispossessing farmers from accessing village lands and their resources, and disrupting the economic dynamics of small-scale farming. As these laws prevent livestock farming within municipal boundaries, farmers are excluded from using previously open village common lands for livestock to generate animal manure. Between 2021 and 2023, there was a 37.4% decline in livestock production in Turkey (Table 1), indicating dismal prospects for mixed-farming and the availability of animal manure.

Table 1. Decline in livestock production in Turkey (2021-2023) (%)

Livestock production	Decline (2021-2022) (%)	Decline (December 2022-June 2023) (%)	Total decline (2021-2023) (%)
Cows	5.6	2	7.6
Buffalo	7.4	2.9	10.3
Sheep	1.1	4.7	5.8
Goats	6.2	7.5	13.7
Total	20.3	17.1	37.4

Author, based on data from TÜİK (2023h) and TÜİK (2022).

The state-sanctioned 'enclosure' of open-access village farmlands and commons has played a crucial role in expanding a more specialised, intensive agriculture that depends on market-based industrial inputs of synthetic fertilisers, while reducing opportunities to find local animal manure. Both increase farmers' production costs as there have been unprecedented hikes in input prices due to Covid-19, the war in Ukraine, and government monetary policy. Overall, input prices increased by 135.06% in August 2022 compared to the same month in 2021 (TÜİK, 2022). Due to unaffordability, farmers reduced their use in 2022.[4,5] Given that metropolitan municipal laws prevent traditional livestock farming in villages, small-scale farmers face the challenge of adapting to a lack of animal manure. To the best of my knowledge, there is no reliable data on the availability,[6] use, and transport of animal manure from distant locations. However, Atasoy's (2023a) in-depth interviews with small-scale farmers in the villages of Güdül highlight farmers' mobilisation of friendship networks, reciprocity, and gift-giving-based arrangements to access animal manure.

A concern with potential supply-chain interruptions due to future pandemics, geo-political/military conflicts or climate change is driving deepening agro-industrialisation in a global agri-food system that favours large-

[4] While there was an increase in the use of synthetic fertilisers from 10,278 tons in 2009 to 14,495 in 2020, there was a decline to 11,332 tons in 2022 (TÜİK, 2023c). Similarly, while the use of chemicals increased from 45,376 tons in 2006 to its peak of 60,020 tons in 2018, it declined to 55,374 tons in 2022 (TÜİK, 2023d).

[5] While overall imports of hybrid seeds increased from 19,227 tons in 2002 to 56,355 tons in 2021, it declined to 37,729 tons in 2022. In vegetable seeds this decline was from 4,091 tons in 2021 to 1,159 tons in 2022 (MAF, 2022c).

[6] Based on an estimated animal-manure availability for cattle (65%), sheep and goat (13%), and poultry (99%), Yılmaz et al. (2019: 252-253) predicted that in 2015 the total collectable fresh manure was roughly 105,5000,000 tons in Turkey, of which 10% was used as fertilizer.

scale industrial farmers. This concern does not necessarily discount the food-producing capacity of small-scale farmers. However, their farming is increasingly seen as *insufficient* for producing food within a standard pattern of efficiency/yield maximisation required for sale in larger markets (Atasoy, 2013). A presumed lack of efficiency by small-scale farmers in achieving higher returns on resources (e.g., land, water, energy, labour) supports the belief that these farmers should exit agriculture altogether. An emphasis on techno-science-based resource-use efficiency to enhance growth in productivity/yields prevails in current discussions on food security and food-price increases in the conjuncture of Covid-19 and war in Ukraine (FAO, 2024). This implies a directional change towards digitalisation and biotechnology innovations in agriculture, and foreshadows the predominance of a high-tech-dependent large-scale commercial agriculture.

In Turkey, formally marketed food prices were 72.86% higher in August 2023 than in the same month in 2022 (TÜİK, 2023a). Food now constitutes the third largest price category in Turkey, following health (77.55%), and restaurant and hotel prices (89.31%). While restaurant and hotel expenditures are not a budgeting concern for low-income households in Turkey (as they rarely eat in restaurants or stay in hotels), food-price hikes *are* expressed in terms of food insecurity. In 2022, food and non-alcoholic drinks constituted the largest spending category in household budgets (22.8%), followed by housing and rent (22.4%) and transportation (21.3%). The lowest 20% income category of households spent 35.8% of their budget on food, compared to 16.6% for the highest 20% income category of households (TÜİK, 2023b). In 2022 in Turkey, the absolute poverty rate (food poverty) was approximately 0.5%; relative poverty (calculated as 50% of median income) remained at 14.4% of the population in 2022, as it was in 2021, while the ratio of those living below the poverty line (calculated as 60% of the median income) increased from 21.3% in 2021 to 21.6% in 2022 (TÜİK, 2023e). Those with limited income who cannot afford to purchase high-priced FFVs (fresh fruits and vegetables), meat, and other socially and nutritiously valued food on a regular and adequate basis experience food insecurity.

The Covid-19 pandemic does not explain class-based food insecurity arising from higher input and market-food prices in Turkey. The country is statistically self-sufficient in per-capita food consumption (*Hürriyetdailynews*, 2021; TÜİK, 2021f). In 2022, Turkey produced 128,600,000 tons of plant-based crops, including 70,200,000 tons of field crops, 26,800,000 tons of fruit, and 31,600,000 tons of vegetables (MAF, 2023: 9). In 2020, agriculture accounted for 6.7% of Turkey's GDP, 3.3% of its exports, and 16% of employment (MAF, 2021: 23). Turkey's FFV exports surged by 14.2% between 2021 and 2022, increasing earnings from US$ 2,696 million to US$ 3,079 million (Ministry of Trade, 2023). Despite these growth rates, Turkey was ranked 49th out of 113 countries in the Global Food Security Index of the World Bank in 2022, with a very low food-affordability score of 58.4 (EUI, 2022). The 'construction' of hunger in terms of low productivity and by reference to pandemic-induced high food and input prices *masks* structural vulnerabilities rooted in the state-led expansion of an export-oriented and market-based industrial model in agriculture.[7]

In Turkey, class-based food insecurity conditioned by a market-oriented model is masked by a government which prioritises foodbanks in providing food to the poor. Introduced in 2004 (Decree No 5035), food banks act within a 'new welfare regime' organised through neoliberal developmentalism (e.g., Akçay, 2021). It relies on poverty-relief charities, social assistance, cash transfers, infrastructure investments, and associated employment/income creation opportunities (e.g., Tuğal, 2023). In 2017, there were 64 foodbank networks operating in local municipalities across Turkey, along with other charities (Kala, 2020: 199). In addition to food, these networks provide support for basic household needs, including clothing, cleaning, and hygiene products. There is no data on the number of people who received food assistance under pandemic conditions. Generally, foodbanks and poverty-relief charities enable the poor to access food based on an Islamic almsgiving tradition that depoliticises food insecurity.

[7] While in 2000 world food supplies were 20% higher than in 1961 (Patel, 2013: 6), the number of hungry people also increased by more than 11% (Rosset, 2000). Today there are around one billion people who suffer from malnutrition and cannot access healthy food.

Currently, the government in Turkey connects future food-system resilience to techno-science-based innovation, research and development, and technologies that are believed to increase efficiency/productivity in agriculture (MAF, 2023, 2020). This connection is also advocated globally to enhance food-system predictability in the face of stress and crises (e.g., FAO, 2021). Specifically, it points to bio-digital precision-agriculture technologies extending agro-industrial input use and generating site-specific data via internet-connected farm-equipment (e.g., drones, John Deere's new tractors) (Atasoy, 2023b; Gardezi & Stock, 2021). Yet these technologies remain experimental throughout the world. They have been adopted by only a few large-scale commercial farmers in the US, Canada, Australia, and Western Europe, concentrating mostly on variable-rate technology (VRT) application of fertilisers and herbicides (Gardezi & Stock, 2021). Many small-scale producers are unaware of such technologies or are unconvinced of the need to adopt them by changing their existing practices (Jones & Pimdee, 2017). In Turkey, very few large-scale export-oriented farmers have experimented with using drones, mobile devices, and Internet-of-Things technologies. Recent research on digitalisation in Turkey's agriculture highlights the role of electronic-networking technologies in expanding contract farming and finance via token-based smart contracts, commodity-backed token and smart-contract trading, and commodity hedging (Küçükçolak & Taylan, 2021). Although highly experimental in Turkey, these technologies serve to incorporate agriculture into corporate high-tech and financial circuits for agro-inputs, techno-scientific computational knowledge production, and algorithmic predictive modelling trajectories (Atasoy, 2023b; Gardezi & Stock, 2021; Stone, 2022). In parallel, the government of Turkey sees data processes as vital in decision-making (MAF, 2023, 2020). However, Atasoy (2023b) presents a convincing argument that data-driven algorithmic precision/predictive modelling trajectories strengthen corporate *bio-digital technology intensification* in agriculture, which further homogenises and standardises the agri-food system, creating new challenges to farmers' locally diverse knowledge and decision-making, while deepening farmers' dispossession.

Overall, Turkey's integration into global value chains increases import dependency on high-cost industrial inputs within standardised high-tech agriculture. The following section examines agro-industrial standardisation of food in supermarkets, which embody a unified notion of production, supply, and consumption of food through market access (Atasoy, 2013).

Standardisation in agro-food: Supermarkets, GLOBALG.A.P., and national GAP

Agro-industrial development is accompanied by the expectation that farmers comply with supermarket-led private standards. Supermarket chains began to proliferate in global agri-food relationships in the 1980s (Reardon et al., 2009) in the general context of a neoliberal reorganisation of global agriculture. In 2023, there were more than 51,000 supermarkets in Turkey with more than five stores. Of these 46,000 are nationally organised hard-discount markets. It is estimated that the number of stores opened by discount and national chains will reach 55,000 by 2029 (*Retail Türkiye*, 2023: 28-29). This represents one supermarket-store for every 1,545 consumers across Turkey. As these stores are located in the most populous cities in Turkey, there is intense per-capita concentration in urban areas (higher than that of Canada's supermarket distribution of one store for approximately 2,500 consumers).

Retailers here include Migros, founded as a joint venture in 1975 between the Turkish-owned Koç Holding and Migros-Swiss[8], and CarréfourSA, founded in 1997 between Carréfour-France and Turkish-owned Sabancı Holding. Turkish-owned supermarkets include BİM, founded in 1995, ÜLKER (Yıldız Holding) after purchasing ŞOK in 2011, and A-101, founded in 2008. While joint ventures tend to operate markets of all sizes, the Turkish-owned chains focus on hard-discount stores, which became attractive to cash-constrained food-insecure consumers, particularly after the 2001 economic crisis. The example of BİM is instructive.

BİM is the first hard-discount store and currently the largest supermarket chain in Turkey. By the end of 2022, BİM had 11,500 stores. Compared to the previous year, it achieved 12% growth in the number of stores and

[8] The Migros-Swiss is a GLOBALG.A.P. member.

a 109% increase in consolidated sales volume, reaching TL148 billion. In 2022, the average number of daily customer visits reached 5.8 million (BİM, 2022: 12). With a product portfolio of 850 items, BİM (nd1) supplies 80% of the basic daily consumption needs for a household. It also has a private-label portfolio of 68 products which accounted for 65% of sales in 2022 (BİM, 2022: 12).

The legislative changes undertaken by the government of Turkey prefigured the fashioning of an entire food-provisioning system along a market-oriented agro-industrial model and complemented the proliferation of supermarkets. These changes include the Good Agricultural Practices (GAP) project of 2004 (Bylaw No. 25577), amended in 2010 (By-law No. 27778) (İTUİY [İyi Tarım Uygulamalarına İlişkin Yönetmelik], 2019, 2004), the Agriculture Law (No. 5488) of 2006 and the Seeds Law (No. 5553), also of 2006, as well as wholesale market laws. All point to greater standardisation within the general export- and market-based framework of GAP that anticipates the ascendance of large-scale farming. The Turkish GAP combines standards developed by the GLOBALG.A.P., International Organisation for Standardisation (ISO), particularly ISO 9001, ISO 22000, and HACCP standards. According to the Ministry of Trade (2020), Turkish FFV exporters adopt the ISO 9001, ISO 22000, HACCP, GAP, and GLOBALG.A.P. standards. Given that the government aligns Turkey's agriculture along an agro-industrial model and its standards for boosting exports, the following section examines how the GLOBALG.A.P. imposes compliance with these standards as a condition for supermarket-oriented sales. This has exclusionary outcomes for small-scale farmers.

The GLOBALG.A.P. (Global Partnership for Good Agricultural Practice)[9] aims to harmonise standards for 'good agricultural practice' worldwide, leading to the growing influence of high-tech in the standardisation of global agricultures. It applies to at least 200,000 farmers in more than 132 countries, operating under GLOBALG.A.P. certification, and over 4 million ha of land, including in Turkey (GLOBALG.A.P., nd1).

Since April 2022, the GLOBALG.A.P. has emphasised that data-driven processes and technologies are essential for instituting outcome-oriented and impact-driven 'smarter standards'. It has revised its 'integrated farm assurance' (IFA) standards, currently called IFAv6, in fruit and vegetables. This was done to streamline and create 'stronger integrity' in farm-assurance of quality standards through Internet-based measuring of impacts, auditing, and certification for 'continuous improvement at every level' of production (GLOBALG.A.P., nd2). Digitised IFA requires farm-level data gathering and analytics. Data-driven technologies have been largely experimental in global agricultures, but GLOBALG.A.P. is pushing farmers to adopt these technologies to continuously produce 'enough' food while safeguarding food safety. In 2024, GLOBALG.A.P. joined with the online platform *Farmable*, which, through its farm-management software, is 'dedicated to revolutionising agricultural industry for enhanced productivity and efficiency'.[10] Research reveals that small-scale farmers' compliance with GAP standards is short-lived, depending on the availability of financial support from governments (Holzapfel & Wollni, 2014). Standards may also result in the exclusion of small-scale farmers from GAP-certified FFV production (Atasoy, 2017: 64; Gibbon & Ponte, 2005). Thus, various multilateral organisations, including the FAO (2021), advocate for bridging the digital divide to allow small-scale farmers to improve their production quality and quantity, along with their capacity for responding to risks related to diseases, pandemics, and market access in a standard way.

The GLOBALG.A.P. is a 'third party certification' association, with 180 accredited certification bodies (CB) around the world[11]. Its website lists 12 subject areas ranging from food safety to traceability. Within these areas, it lists: 190 principles to be met by producers; 221 "major musts" requiring 100% compliance; 120

[9] The GLOBALG.A.P. was established in 2007, replacing the EUREPGAP (Euro-Retailer Produce Working Group – EUREP) which was founded in 1997. It is a consortium of many leading supermarket chains. Its website lists 51 retail and food-service members, including Walmart, Whole Foods, Tesco, Kroeger, Aldi, Ahold, Carréfour, McDonald, and Swiss-Migros. https://www.globalgap.org/.content/.galleries/documents/180221_Country_Partner_web.pdf. Unless otherwise mentioned, all GLOBALG.A.P. website references were accessed on 3 October 2023.

[10] https://www.globalgap.org/news/new-community-member-farmable/ (accessed 10 April 2024).

[11] https://www.globalgap.org/

"minor musts" with 95% compliance requirements; and 20 additional recommendations (GLOBALG.A.P., nd3). Producers are required to implement a 'continuous improvement' plan to analyse current practices using real data, report areas that can be improved, set measurable goals for improvement, implement new measures in their farming practices, check progress through audits, and revise their continuous improvement plan. The GLABALG.A.P. also has several add-ons as voluntary tools to be used in combination with IFA. Among them is GRASP, designed for risk assessment of workers' health, safety, and welfare, developed in accordance with the core principles of the ILO (International Labour Organisation) (GLABALG.A.P., nd4), and the Food Safety Modernisation Act (FSMA) of 2023, which offers food quality- and safety-criteria guidance for industry (GLOBALG.A.P., nd5).[12]

These standards are all aligned with private supermarket standards. The GLOBALG.A.P.'s 'Nurture' is an audit module developed by TESCO in 2017. It is based on TESCO's performance-measurement indicators. The accredited CBs whose members are trained at the GLOBALG.A.P. academy[13] use 'Nurture' in their GLOBALG.A.P. compliance scoring system.[14] These standards require extensive documentation, digital technology, labelling, input calculation, rigorous third-party certification, and the necessary infrastructure in equipment, tools, buildings, sampling and testing, as well as personal qualification, training and hygienic practices. The costs related to implementation and monitoring of standards, proof of compliance, CB service fees, and system participation fees belong to producers and vary depending on farm size, location, and existing national policies (GLOBALG.A.P., nd6). There are 1,000 international experts active on technical committees, national technical working groups, and focus groups, as well as 2,000 auditors[15] working for more than 180 approved CBs affiliated with the GLOBALG.A.P. Farmers are not party to negotiations in the development of principles, standards and add-ons, which require the technical expertise of professional specialists. Supermarkets rely on CBs and preferred suppliers to achieve compliance with their standards (Gibbon and Ponte, 2005).

The GLOBALG.A.P. recognises nationally established GAP standards, provided they are equivalent and have received approval. The congruity established between the GLOBALG.A.P. and national GAP programmes ensures world-wide harmonisation of standards for a smooth and steady flow of food in global supply chains. National certification procedures follow the rules established within the GLOBALG.A.P. certification 'Integrity Programme', operational since 2008 (GLOBALG.A.P., nd7).

In Turkey, GLOBALG.A.P. standards are nationally implemented and have been monitored by the government since the enactment of the GAP project in 2004 in accordance with the previous EUREPGAP. The number of GAP-certified farmers in Turkey increased 15-fold from 2007 to 2022 (651 to 9,570), accompanied by a 39-fold increase in farmlands under GAP operation – from 5,361 ha across 18 provinces to 206,893 ha across 70 provinces. The amount of food produced under GAP certification also surged, from 56,000 tons in 2007 to 5,336,252 tons in 2022 (MAF, 2022a). Ankara now has 179 GAP-certified farmers. The largest concentration of these farmers is in Urfa (1,350 farmers), Adana (1,512 farmers), and Gaziantep (841 farmers) (MAF, 2022b), where all are involved in export-oriented monoculture crop production for European markets. The number of GAP-certified farmers is nevertheless very small compared with the approximately 5 million farmers operating in Turkey. There is no data on annual fluctuations in the participation rates and the scale of participating farms. Data presented by Atasoy (2017: 65) shows that in 2012 the average size of farms within the Turkish-GAP programme was approximately 16 ha – much larger than the average 5 ha-size held by the majority of producers in Turkey. National supermarkets are increasingly demanding that farmers comply with GAP standards and display the GAP-certification label on the food in their stores.

[12] Other add-ons include SPRING, a sustainable program for irrigation and ground water use; TR4, a biosecurity standard; Biodiversity guidelines; AH-DLL GROW, a tool designed to measure producers' risk management; and COOP ITALIA, a pesticide transparency act.
[13] GLOBALG.A.P. academy was established in 2012. https://www.globalgap.org/uk_en/for-producers/globalg.a.p.-add-on/.
[14] https://www.globalgap.org/uk_en/for-producers/globalg.a.p.-add-on/nurture-module/.
[15] https://globalgapsolutions.org/

BİM is not a member of GLOBALG.A.P. but has its-own private criteria and tests the compliance of its products with national GAP standards. It tests at least 10,000 foodstuffs annually through independent and accredited public and private laboratories. The production plants and suppliers are inspected and audited in relation to a 'question list' designed by BİM (nd2) for quality assurance. The list is not displayed on BİMs website. The chain aims to ensure that by 2026, 10% of its private-label products have QR codes providing information on the quality of food sold in its stores (BİM, 2022: 8). In 2022, working exclusively with a total of 1,578 local suppliers, BİM conducted 756 supplier audits (BİM, 2022: 12).

Given that only a small number of large-scale commercial farmers (9,570 in 2022) operate as GAP producers, the government aims to expand standardisation into small-scale production through contract farming. In 2020, 185,399 farmers produced FFVs and seeds/cereals under contract (*Cumhuriyet Newspaper*, 2020). However, it is not known how many of these contracts have actually been concluded as they are not submitted to the Ministry. Moreover, the inspection of food standards is typically carried out through one-time farm visits by government-accredited inspectors using simple Yes/No questions.[16] In general, farm-based food-quality assurance lacks rigorous inspection and completed contracts. Industrial input-dependent, standardised agriculture is nevertheless expanding, with a focus on a market-based enlargement of food production, particularly in the face of disease, pandemics, wars, and climate change.

Large-scale commercial farmers who operate within high-cost standardised high-tech agriculture producing for *formally organised markets* (e.g., supermarkets, large hotels, and export) have little flexibility to adjust to supply-chain interruptions and associated cost/price increases. As I demonstrate below, low-cost, unregistered migrant/refugee farmworkers and highly exploitative labour practices constitute their adaptation to the price/cost pressures of industrial agriculture.

Large-scale farmers' adaptation strategy: Racialised migrant/refugee households as a labouring unit

As regards labour standards, Turkey was considered a high-risk country in 2023, ranked 35th on the World Bank's country-risk-classification list.[17] The Turkish GAP and wholesale markets law do not require registration of information for on-farm labour practices. The GLOBALG.A.P. itself presents its GRASP labour standards as an add-on voluntary tool. Medium and large-scale commercial farmers in Turkey rely on seasonally hired labour drawn from racialised Kurdish and Syrian migrant groups with no legal scrutiny. The mass influx of Syrian refugee workers after 2015 was crucial in the mitigation of potential disruptions to the food supply, including the impact of Covid-19. There are approximately 3,600,000 Syrian refugees in Turkey, who are not granted full refugee rights but are required to register with the government to receive 'temporary protection'. They can apply for a work permit six months after obtaining their temporary-protection status. Syrians working in seasonal agriculture and livestock are exempt from the work-permit requirement (Zuntz et al., 2022: 248), thereby enlarging an already significant pool of informally employed unregistered farmworkers within a racially segmented labour market.

There is only a small decline (5.58%) in the rate of unregistered labour in agriculture, down from 90.14% in 2002 to 84.56% in 2021, compared to a 23.14% decline in all categories of employment from 52.14% to 29% during the same period (Social Security Institute of Turkey [SGK], 2022). Unregistered farmworkers are generally hired for weed clearance and crop harvests, for which they earn very low wages. In Ankara in 2022 the daily wage for seasonal agricultural workers was TL191 (TÜİK, 2023g) or approximately Can$10. Because informal employment is prevalent, the official daily-wage figure is misleading. Medium/large-scale commercial farmers rely on seasonally hired migrant workers, consisting of male and female members of

[16] https://www.tarimorman.gov.tr/Konular/Bitkisel-Uretim/Iyi-Tarim-Uygulamalari (accessed 27 October 2023).
[17] GLOBALG.A.P. Country Risk Classification, 2023. https://www.globalgap.org/.content/.galleries/documents/230101_Country-Risk-Classification-2023-Full-List-A-Z_en.pdf.

entire households. They are hired through the intermediary of agro-labour contractors (known as çavuş). There is no official data on ethnicity-based agricultural wages in Turkey. My research shows that their wages are based on the *entire household perceived as one labouring unit*, and that the low level of wages is justified by the assumed limited sustenance needs of a migrant family.

The following analysis is based on my interviews with farmworkers, *çavu*ş, and a commercial farmer. The çavuş I interviewed subcontracted these migrant workers. Because they were not fluent in Turkish, my conversations with the workers were translated by *çavu*ş. Two of the *çavu*ş subcontracted with an agro-trader who was operating a commercial farm growing green-onions, and the third çavuş subcontracted with a lettuce- and carrot-producing export-oriented commercial farmer. Two of the çavuş were themselves Syrian refugees who knew Turkish. The other – fluent in Arabic – was a Turk. These çavuş were from Ceylanpınarı, a border town divided between Turkey and Syria by a fence and railroad tracks with a predominantly Kurdish and Arab population. The Turkish çavuş was from the Turkish part of Ceylanpınarı within the province of Urfa, and the Syrian çavuş was from the Syrian part of Ceylanpınarı known as Ras Al Ain. These çavuş communicated with workers in Arabic. Workers were members of three families with close kinship ties.

The workers were all teenagers, except one who was 22 years old. The youngest was a 14-year-old. They were students in Syria, but none were attending school in Turkey. The Turkish government cuts off refugee family-support for children over the age of 14, thereby pushing teenagers into the workforce and creating the conditions for *labouring by dispossession*. During my research I observed that Syrian refugees had replaced the Kurdish workers who were previously predominant in the migrant-labour force in agriculture. The Kurdish worker who knew Turkish explained the reason for this shift, and the Turkish çavuş from Urfa concurred. The worker, a 17-year-old from Mardin, was no longer a migrant and lived in Beypazarı:

> *There are now around 5,000 Syrian-refugee farm workers in Beypazarı. They are brought here to replace the Kurds ... after the 2015 tension with the Kurds[18] [when] Kurds were violently expelled from Beypazarı … not by the police but by some 40 young Turkish nationalists who physically attacked the Kurds and beat them up on the streets ... There were lots of street fights. The attempted military coup in 2016 intensified anti-Kurdish hatred by these Turkish nationalist thugs. (Interview, 23 May 2018)*

The Turkish çavuş from Urfa added:

> *In the past we had about 5,000 Kurds working around here. I alone brought 1,500 Kurdish workers from Urfa. Some of these Kurds liked Beypazarı and settled here … There was no tension between the Turkish and Kurdish people. But, after the attempted coup, they became unwanted. (Interview, 23 May 2018)*

I asked if the police were not protecting the Kurdish workers, and whether Syrian refugees were facing similar racially motivated tension. The Turkish çavuş replied:

> *Police were Gülenists.[19] They were fired and lost their jobs after the coup attempt … There is another side to this: Kurds were taking their money back to family in their hometowns after the harvest rather than spending it here. Syrians … are settled here … shopkeepers are happy. From time-to-time we hear talk from the locals like 'the state takes it away from us and gives Syrians the money'. But so far there's no conflict. (Interview, 23 May 2018)*

The Syrian çavuş explained:

> *We did not come here to make money. There is war in Syria. We have no choice; we cannot go back to Syria. We are from the Syrian Ceylanpınarı where the Kurdish PYD is dominant; either ISIS or government forces,*

[18] These tensions followed the collapse of negotiations, known as the 'solution process' (çözüm süreci), between the Turkish government and Kurdish groups in July 2015 when two police officers were murdered in Ceylanpınarı, Urfa, on 22 July 2015 by unknown individual(s). The crimes were blamed on the PKK.

[19] The Gülenist movement is one of the main mass-based civil society religious movements which emerged in the 1970s under the leadership of Fethullah Gülen. It has been accused of engineering the attempted military coup against the AKP government in 2016.

> *or other groups dominate the other parts of Syria. These people are here for their safety. (Interview, 23 May 2018)*

The Turkish çavuş from Urfa likened Syrian economic hardship to that of Turkish workers who migrated to Germany during the 1960s-70s. He explained:

> *Turks were guest workers in Germany whereas Syrians are refugees, escaping from the war. Nobody asked them to come to Turkey. Nevertheless, they are poor … They supply low-cost labour, filling the labour gap, just as Turks in Germany did. (Interview, 23 May 2018)*

The large-scale farmer who produces lettuce and carrots for export explained the important role of Syrian workers in agriculture after the Kurds were expelled:

> *After 2015 and 2016, we couldn't find workers ... Local people don't work in the open fields; weeds spread everywhere and we couldn't harvest our crops. The wealthy and the government made local people lazy and parasitic. There are lots of charity monies circulating around all the time. They don't need to work in open fields for long hours under the sun for little money. (Interview, 28 May 2018)*

It is important to note that the scarcity of local labour and racially motivated removal of low-cost Kurdish migrant workers has resulted in Syrian refugees filling the gap at a very low cost. In 2018, Syrians working 12 hours a day at a TL50 per day (the equivalent of Can$1.16 per hour based on the 26 May 2018 conversion rate) earned less than the official minimum wage.[20] However, these low wages take on greater significance when traced to labour-contracting arrangements between çavuş, agrotraders, and farmers. The çavuş contract workers on behalf of farmers or agrotraders, and transport them from their residences in town to the fields using their own vans. Workers do not pay for their transportation; agrotraders and/or farmers pay TL150 per van per day. Therefore, the çavuş earns three times more than the average worker if he uses only one van, and they generally use three vehicles. The *çavu*ş is also responsible for organising work, disciplining labour, and increasing labour productivity, frequently yelling at workers using phrases as "*hadi, hadi, çabuk ol*" (come on, come on, be quick, fast). Farmers and agrotraders often complain that Syrians are slow and unskilled in farm work compared to Kurdish workers.

The large-scale commercial farmer explained that Syrians are very young and inexperienced; they are slow and often damage the crops by stepping on them or by cutting lettuce the wrong way. Given that an experienced local worker demands a wage three times greater than the average paid to a Syrian worker, this farmer continues to work with *çavu*ş who support farmers' low-wage requirements (Interview, 29 May 2018). The *çavu*ş from Urfa elaborated: 'These people live in shanty houses as members of a whole extended family and share the rent. Shanty houses are already cheap. They don't need much. Since they work as a family, they can pool their income for spending'. (Interview, 28 May 2018) The Syrian çavuş explained that 'These kids are all relatives, children of uncles and aunts; they can support each other' (Interview, 28 May 2018). I interviewed the 14-year-old worker who explained that he and his sister can pool TL3,000 per month (Can$833) in support of a family of nine (Can$92 per each family member per month).

The widely-held perception of the 'complete household as a labouring unit' is commonly used to justify lower wages for individual workers who typically earn less than the legally defined minimum wage. Without legal recognition as refugees, Syrians work under the threat of deportation and loss of livelihood. In 2021, I observed that these workers were not tested on farms for the corona virus. Rather than their health, they were more concerned with lockdowns that might negatively affect their employment. Within a context where labour standards are ignored and nationalist ethnic tension is high, the use of low-cost Syrian farmworkers enables large-scale farms to adapt to the price/cost pressures of industrial farming.

Below I briefly discuss how small-scale farmers respond to structural constraints within agro-industrialisation and continue to produce market food. My argument is preliminary, requiring further research based on in-

[20] https://www.csgb.gov.tr/en/Contents/Istatistikler/AsgariUcret (accessed 30 may 2018).

depth interviews.

Exclusion of the unregistered from formally established markets

There are 176 wholesale markets across Turkey (MAF, 2021: 44). The 'Regulation of Fresh Vegetable and Fruit Trade and Wholesale Markets Law' of 27 June 1995 (No. 552), revised (No. 5957) in 2010, requires farmers to sell their FFVs through municipally organised wholesale-market terminals via the intermediary of commisioners, agrotraders, producers, and producers' unions. Commissioners sell produce on behalf of producers; agrotraders purchase produce from the growers and sell as owners; and producers and producers' unions sell their own products.[21] The law requires registration of products for traceability of quality and origin (Article 6), and the registration of product characteristics must be placed on packaging boxes to confirm 'product identity'. The law prohibits unregistered FFVs without product identification from being sold in supermarkets, municipally organised neighbourhood pazars, and other formal marketing outlets.

The Regulation also introduced an electronic 'wholesale registration system' within the Ministry of Trade. It requires FFV-trading individuals, who themselves must register, to enter product information.[22] It also allows agrotraders to emerge as siginificant players in the formal marketing of FFVs. This effectively consolidates social hierarchies between medium/large-scale commercial farmers and small-scale producers. These hierarchies are based on agrotraders' dealing with a small number of medium/large-scale farmers who can produce larger quantities of standardised food according to an industrial model. The law, therefore, signals the exclusion of a large number of small-scale and unregistered farmers, along with their locally diverse customary practices and non-standard food.

Agrotraders also enter into contract-farming relations with medium/large-scale farmers, but these contracts often lack formal scrunity by the Ministry. They contract out produce while it is growing in the fields, hire agricultural workers with the intermediation of *çavuş*, and formally sell the produce as their own to wholesale markets and supermarkets. Agrotraders are required to register information on products and producers via their smartphones in the wholesale registration system before transporting produce from the farm (Retail Türkiye, 2012). The law does not consider on-farm practices, nor does it offer mechanisms to protect farmers and labour against the potentially arbitrary business practices of agrotraders. There is currently approximately a TL15 difference in per-kilo price of FFVs between the farm-level procurement price and market-sale price in supermarkets, often attributed to agrotraders bypassing wholesale markets and selling directly to supermarkets when determining prices (Analiz Newspaper, 2022). In response, the government is planning to revise the existing law to ensure that market-food prices are determined daily at wholesale markets and that products unregistered with the wholesale market are considered 'illegal' for sale (Analiz Newspaper, 2022).

Given that registration is a formal condition for FFV sale, the law effectively enables agrotraders to exclude small-scale producers who do not or cannot comply with the GAP standards increasingly demanded by retailers. Excluded from retailer-led formal-marketing channels, small-scale farmers engage in street vending, door-to-door sales, rural district *pazars*, and other forms of informal-sale niches to sustain themselves.

The National Registry of Farmers (Çiftçi Kayıt Sistemi – ÇKS) founded in 2001 plays a central role in this exclusion. It ties farmers' eligibility for government agricultural support to formal ownership, size of farmland and number of livestock (Resmi Gazete, 2014), disregarding the existing customary tenurial relations prevailing in small-scale farming in Turkey (Keyder & Yenal, 2011). Many small-scale farmers own less than two hectares of land and are ineligible for government agricultural support. Hence, there is no reason to register. Unregistered farmers therefore have to act creatively and resourcefully to enlarge their marketing niches – a process which

[21] Commissioners pay taxes to the municipality and receive a 3–8% commission on total sales for brokering FFV sales on behalf of producers. Traders, producers and producers' unions do not pay a commission to the municipality (Atasoy, 2017: 213).
[22] Producers are not required to register themselves or their produce.

rests on the legally sanctioned exclusion of unregistered farmers and their food from formal markets.

Approximately 2,765,287 farmers were registered with the ÇKS in 2003 (MFAL, 2014: 209). Registration declined to 2,173,000 farmers in 2022 (TZOB, 2022), falling below the 2001 level of 2,182,767 farmers (MFAL, 2014: 209). The 2022 registration level represents 43.46% of the total number of approximately 5 million farmers in Turkey. Therefore, a significant 56.54% of all farmers are unregistered and cannot enter formally established markets. Small-scale farmers constitute the lowest income-earning category in agriculture (MAF, 2021: 45). They also operate *without any* social-security coverage as they are not registered with the SGK. In 2023, 459,463 farmers were registered with the SGK,[23] representing only 9.19% of all farmers in Turkey.

These farmers are not a homogeneous group: there *are* place-specific similarities, but also differences, particularly in relation to their adoption of agro-industrial methods (Atasoy, 2017; Aydın, 2010; Karataşlı & Kumral, 2023; Keyder & Yenal, 2011; Öztürk, et al., 2018). During my fieldwork I found that small-scale farmers are not entirely outside industrial input-supply chains, nor are they opposed to the idea of industrially driven productivity enhancement. They purchase their hybrid seeds and agro-chemicals from Ayık Tarım (a seed and agro-chemical distributing company) and seedlings from Bey Fide (the second largest greenhouse seedling-growing company in Turkey) in Beypazarı, and often utilise a mixture of industrial and customary methods in their production. They practice mixed-crop and livestock farming, generate natural fertiliser, use animal manure from village barns, manage weeds by hoeing or hand-picking, and generally engage in crop rotation on a yearly basis. Their non-standardised farming enables them to offset some of the adverse effects of input/price hikes. Because these farmers are flexible in combining a multiplicity of practices, they can easily switch to locally available resources. They are proud of producing food without a complete reliance on agrochemicals such as synthetic fertilisers, pesticides and herbicides, and have no desire to register or certify the quality of their produce industrially. They believe their lasting ties with established customers provide adequate verification of their food quality.

Small-scale farmers rely mostly on unwaged household labour (also see: Aydın, 2002; Keyder, 1993) and a strong work ethic, believing that a 'good farmer' and 'good farming practices' require 'hard work' (cf. Silvasti, 2003). They *occasionally* hire low-cost migrant labour, particularly during harvest time. The farmers I encountered during my fieldwork appear to be driven by a profound sense of what is 'enough', having no desire to earn more. One farmer explained to me that as a family they aim to live by their own means without depending on outside help. Believing that greed is a sin, he commented: 'There is nothing that we can take with us to the other side when we pass away' (Interview, 18 May 2021). Farmers' desire to produce 'enough good food' to sell dovetails with their labour practices. They rely mainly on their own labour, supplemented by the assistance of relatives and hemşeri (fellow village folk). Contrary to the general expectation that unpaid household female labour is the underlying factor in the survival of small-scale farms (Arizpe 2014; Kocabicak, 2022), household female labour has only occasionally been used (typically during harvest) on farms in the village of Harmancık.[24] While the pattern I observed cannot be generalised, it *is* part of the regionally varied labour relations in the small-scale production of market food throughout Turkey (Atasoy, 2017; Aydın, 2002; 2010; Benlisoy, 2022; Gürel, 2011; Keyder & Yenal, 2011).

The main challenge faced by unregistered small-scale farmers is not how to produce enough food to sell, but finding ways to sell it. This depends on farmers' abilities in persuasive communication with their consumers to generate trust in their farming and food. Atasoy (2017: Ch.5) describes this form of trust-building as 'participatory certification by consumers for non-standard local food'. It is not a formally organised certification process, but a form of 'quality assurance' that communicates quality in culturally specific ways, signalling valuations based on the 'taste and smell' of place and local food cultures. There is always some degree of

[23] https://veri.sgk.gov.tr/ (accessed 25 October 2023).

[24] For an analysis of the disinclination of farmers' spouses and local village women to work in open-field agriculture in some of the villages of Güdül in Ankara, see: Atasoy (2023a).

uncertainty regarding their use of agro-industrial inputs. However, for the small-scale farmers I interviewed, informally diffused trust in the quality and marketability of their food is at least as valuable, if not more so, than formal rules of codification. Farmers have turned their exclusion from the standardised agri-food system into an asset through personal ties nurtured with consumers over the years in various neighbourhoods across Ankara. The farmers are well-known as vendors who commute by their pick-up trucks across various urban neighbourhoods on different days of the week. They are well-established in selling their food in village squares and pazars, and through personal connections with various urban communities.[25]

The resilience of these farmers lies *in* their positioning within a market economy based on the use of both natural village resources and industrial inputs, and reliance on their own and family labour – along with culturally mobilised support networks and personally cultivated trust-based connections with consumers in informal markets. It is through such positioning within the market-economic domain that farmers consider their adaptive responses to structural constraints.

Conclusion

This paper has explored the state-led development of commercial agriculture in Turkey, a process directed towards increasing market-based and export-oriented earnings through an industrial model. Publicly available official sources and data gathered from pre-pandemic fieldwork and interviews have been presented to make sense of this agricultural remaking. The most significant outcomes include: an increased cost/price squeeze, supermarket-led standardisation of food, displacement of non-standard farming and food crops, marginalisation and exclusion of small-scale traditional farmers, growing food insecurity for the poor, and racialisation and exploitation of farmworkers within segmented labour markets. These conditions rest on the state-sanctioned consolidation of social hierarchies between medium/large-scale commercial farmers and small-scale peasant-like producers. The neoliberal, developmentalist expansion of an industrial model in agriculture has produced a state of 'enclosure' for small-scale farmers and their farming practices, excluding them through planned change.

The Covid-19 pandemic and climate change constitute the current world-historical conjuncture of capitalism. It is within this conjuncture that new opportunities arise for the government in Turkey (and throughout the world) to restructure agri-food, particularly through a high-tech precision-agriculture trajectory that intersects with agro-industrialisation. A relatively quick, conjunctural need to respond to potential disruptions in agriculture and food security thus underpins more enduring, longer-term restructuring projects. Although it is currently an understudied research subject, this restructuring can only magnify existing structural conditions of exploitation and marginalisation, while simultaneously deepening market-oriented economic growth for boosting market/export earnings.

Small-scale farmers are not silent when it comes to the conditions that produce their marginalisation and exclusion from industrial agriculture; they are engaged in efforts to counter the conditions of marginalisation, both relationally and culturally, while also creating viable niches in which to informally sell their food. Preliminary findings suggest that, based on mixed-farming practices, use of both natural village resources and industrial inputs, and reliance on their own family labour and village support, as well as personally established connections with consumers, these farmers adapt to the structural constraints of an agro-industrialisation process that excludes them and their non-standard food. These efforts produce effects which sustain their continuing presence in agriculture through an expanding economic sphere of informalisation. Small-scale farmers do not treat their actions within the informal sphere as the survival response of a vulnerable and desolate group; rather, the 'informal' is implicated precisely *in* the historical practices of small-scale farming as it intersects with standardised agriculture. Thus, the resilience of small-scale farmers is situated *within* the very processes of agro-industrial standardisation, leading me to conclude that the resolve of small-scale farmers is

[25] For a similar observation in the town of Güdül in Ankara, see: Atasoy (2023a).

not to be discounted.

Although additional research is required to confirm these findings, small-scale farmers' flexibly organised farming and marketing practices appear to underpin their ability to withstand the hardships arising from state-led agricultural restructuring along an industrial model. Farmers' co-existence with industrial standardisation, their selective incorporation of industrial elements, and their adoption of some new technologies raises concerning questions about the prospects and future viability of small-scale farming. In the long run, the children of small-scale traditional farmers may not be successful in developing creative ways to remain viable; they may ultimately be forced to withdraw from farming. In the foreseeable future, however, small-scale producers and sellers of food in Turkey are likely to demonstrate continued adaptability and resilience in the face of rapid and profound socio-cultural, political, and economic transformation.

References

Akram-Lodhi AH (2021) The ties that bind? *The Journal of Peasant Studies* 48(4):687-714.

Akçay Ü (2021) Authoritarian consolidation dynamics in Turkey. *Contemporary Politics* 27(1):79-104.

Analiz Newspaper (2022) Hal yasası, Tüketici ve üreticiyi koruyacak mı? https://www.analizgazetesi.com.tr/haber/hal-yasasi-tuketici-ve-ureticiyi-koruyacak-mi-9566/ (accessed 6 October 2023).

Arizpe L (2014) Relay Migration and the Survival of the Peasant Household. In: Lourdes A (ed.) *A Mexican Pioneer in Anthropology*. Springer, pp. 71-92.

Atasoy Y (2023a) Small-scale Village Farmers and Enrichment-value Creation in Ankara-Turkey. In: XX ISA World Congress of Sociology, Melbourne, Australia, 25 June-July 1.

Atasoy Y (2023b) Agriculture by Algorithm. In: XX ISA World Congress of Sociology, Melbourne, Australia, 25 June-July 1.

Atasoy Y (2017) *Commodification of Global Agrifood Systems and Agro-ecology*. London: Routledge.

Atasoy Y (2013) Supermarket Expansion in Turkey. *Journal of Agrarian Change* 13(4):547-70.

Aydın Z (2010) Neo-liberal transformation of Turkish agriculture. *Journal of Agrarian Change* 10(2):149-187.

Aydın Z (2002) The new right, structural adjustment and Turkish agriculture. *The European Journal of Development Research* 14(2):183-208.

Benlisoy ZCE (2024) Women in agribusiness amid crises of social reproduction. *The Journal of Peasant Studies* 51(1):37-58.

Bernstein H (2010) *Class Dynamics of Agrarian Change*. Fernwood.

BİM (2022) *BIM Sustainability Report 2022*.pdf. Accessed 16 October 2023.

BİM (nd1) Philosophy. https://english.bim.com.tr/Categories/627/bim-philosophy.aspx (accessed 5 October 2023).

BİM (nd2) Quality assurance. https://english.bim.com.tr/Categories/628/quality-assurance.aspx (accessed 5 October 2023).

Clapp J. & Moseley WG (2020) This food crisis is different. *The Journal of Peasant Studies* 47(7):1393-1417.

Cumhuriyet Newspaper (2020) AKP'nin yaygınlaştırdığı sözleşmeli tarım, çiftciyi mağdur eden bir sisteme dönüştü. 29 September. https://www.cumhuriyet.com.tr/haber/akpnin-yayginlastirdigi-sozlesmeli-tarim-ciftciyi-magdur-eden-bir-sisteme-donustu-1769625 (accessed 2 October 2023).

EUI (Economist Intelligence Unit) (2022) Rankings and trends: country rankings, 2022. https://impact.economist.com/

sustainability/project/food-security-index/ (accessed 2 October 2023).

FAO (2024) Increasing resilience through the water-energy-food-ecosystems (WEFE) nexus.https://www.fao.org/3/cc8220en/online/sustainable-agrifood-systems-in-the-mediterranean-2023/lever-2.html (accessed 3 April 2024).

FAO (2021) *Food system transformation*. https://www.fao.org/3/cb7978en/cb7978en.pdf (accessed 3 April 2024).

Gardezi M & Stock R (2021) Growing Algorithmic Rationality. *Journal of Rural Studies* 4(2021):1-11.

Gibbon P & Ponte S (2005) *Trading Down*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

GLOBALG.A.P. (nd1) Facts and figures.https://www.globalgap.org/export/sites/default/.content/.galleries/Documents_Other/220512_IFA-v6-FV_presentation-full_EN.pdf (accessed 3 October 2023).

GLOBALG.A.P. (nd2) Smart farm assurance solutions. https://www.globalgap.org/export/sites/default/.content/.galleries/Documents_Media_Gallery/211207_Smart-Farm-Assurance-Solutions_Our-vision-for-the-future.pdf (accessed 3 October 2023).

GLOBALG.A.P. (nd3) Integrated Farm Assurance (IFA) Fruit and Vegetables. https://documents.globalgap.org/documents/220929_IFA_Smart_PCs_FV_v6_0_Sep22_en.pdf (accessed 3 October 2023).

GLABALG.A.P. (nd4) What is GRASP. https://www.globalgap.org/uk_en/for-producers/globalg.a.p.-add-on/grasp/what-is-GRASP/# (accessed 3 October 2023).

GLOBALG.A.P. (nd5) Guidance for Industry. https://www.fda.gov/regulatory-information/search-fda-guidance-documents/guidance-industry-standards-growing-harvesting-packing-and-holding-sprouts-human-consumption (accessed 3 October 2023).

GLOBALG.A.P. (nd6) Integrated Farm Assurance (IFA), Costs. https://www.globalgap.org/export/sites/default/.content/.galleries/Documents_Other/220512_IFA-v6-FV_presentation-full_EN.pdf (accessed 3 October 2023).

GLOBALG.A.P. (nd7) Integrity Program. https://www.globalgap.org/uk_en/what-we-do/the-gg-system/integrity-program/ (accessed 3 October 2023).

Goodman D, Sorj B, & Wilkinson J (1987) *From Farming to Biotechnology*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.

Gürel B (2011) Agrarian change and labour supply in Turkey, 1950-1980. *Journal of Agrarian Change* 11(2):195-219.

Haqiqi I & Horeh MB (2021) Assessment of COVID-19 impacts on U.S. counties using the immediate impact model of local agricultural production (IMLAP). *Agricultural Systems* 190(2021):103132.

Harriss-White B (2023) Petty commodity production. *The Journal of Peasant Studies* 50(1):295-314.

Hazine ve Maliye Bakanlığı (2022) *2022 Yılı Faaliyet Raporu*. https://ms.hmb.gov.tr/uploads/2023/03/2022-HMB-Idare-Faaliyet-Raporu-.pdf (accessed 10 October 2023).

Henry R (2020) Innovations in agriculture and food supply in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. *Molecular plant* 13(8):1095-1097.

Holt-Gimenez E & Altieri MA (2013) Agroecology, food sovereignty, and the new green revolution. *Agroecology and Sustainable Food Systems* 37(1):90-102.

Holzapfel S & Wollni M (2014) Is GlobalGAP certification of small-scale farmers sustainable? *The Journal of Development Studies* 50(5):731–747.

Hürriyetdailynews (2021) 173 kg of fruit, 269 kg of vegetables consumed per person annually in Turkey in 2020. https://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/173-kg-of-fruit-269-kg-of-vegetables-consumed-per-person-annually-in-turkey-in-2020-163191 (accessed 15 January 2022).

İTUİY (2010) http//www.iyi.tarim.gov.tr (accessed 30 January 2012).

İTUİY (2004) http//www.iyi.tarim.gov.tr (accessed 30 January 2012).

Jones C and Pimdee P (2017) Innovative ideas. *Asian International Journal of Social Sciences* 17(1):32.

Jansen K (2015) The debate on food sovereignty theory. *The Journal of Peasant Studies* 42(1):213-232.

Kala ES (2020) Türkiye'de Gıda Bankacılığı Mevzuatı ve Uygulamaları. Yönetim ve Ekonomi Araştırmaları Dergisi 18(3):190-211.

Karataşlı ŞS & Kumral Ş (2023) Crisis of capitalism and cycles of right-wing populism in contemporary Turkey. *Journal of Agrarian Change* 23(1):22–46.

Keyder Ç (1993) The Genesis of Petty Commodity Production in Agriculture. In: Stirling P (ed) *Culture and Economy*. The Eothen Press, pp.171-86.

Keyder Ç & Yenal Z (2011) Agrarian change under globalization. *Journal of Agrarian Change* 11(1):60-86.

Kocabicak E (2022) Gendered property and labour relations in agriculture. *Oxford Development Studies* 50(2):91-113.

Küçükçolak N & Taylan AS (2021) Digitalizing Commodity Trading Value Chain. In: Bahaaeddin A, Hamdan A, & Elgedawy I (eds) *The Importance of New Technologies and Entrepreneurship in Business Development*. Springer, pp.645-658.

Lewison E (2022) Plant, sleep, pick. *Development and Change* 53(4):860-887.

MAF (2024) 2024-2008 Stratejik Plan. https://www.tarimorman.gov.tr/SGB/Belgeler/stratejikplan.pdf (accessed 10 March 2024).

MAF (2023) 2022 İdare Faaliyet Raporu. https://www.tarimorman.gov.tr/SGB/Belgeler/Bakanl%C4%B1k_Faaliyet_Raporlar%C4%B1/TOB%202022%20YILI%20I%CC%87DARE%20FAALI%CC%87YET%20RAPORU.pdf (accessed 13 November 2023).

MAF (2022a) İstatistikler: İTU değişim oranları 2022.docx. https://www.tarimorman.gov.tr/Konular/Bitkisel-Uretim/Iyi-Tarim-Uygulamalari/Istatistikler (accessed 3 October 2023).

MAF (2022b) İstatistikler: İTU İstatistikleri (Bölge-İl-Üretici-Alan)2022.xlsx. https://www.tarimorman.gov.tr/Konular/Bitkisel-Uretim/Iyi-Tarim-Uygulamalari/Istatistikler (accessed 3 October 2023).

MAF (2022c) Tohumculuk istatistikleri: Yıllara göre tohumculuk ithalat miktarı ve parasal değerleri. https://www.tarimorman.gov.tr/BUGEM/Belgeler/Bitkisel%20%C3%9Cretim/Tohumculuk/%C4%B0statistikler/ithalat_miktar_parasal_deger.pdf (accessed 10 October 2023).

MAF (2021) *Towards Sustainable Food Systems*. https://www.tarimorman.gov.tr/ABDGM/Belgeler/Uluslararas%C4%B1%20Kurulu%C5%9Flar/NATIONAL%20PATHWAY%20OF%20TURKEY_29%20Kas%C4%B1m.pdf (accessed 10 October 2023).

MAF (2020) Tarımda dijitalleşme sürüyor, 22.07.2020. https://www.tarimorman.gov.tr/Haber/4650/Tarimda-Dijitallesme-Suruyor (accessed 14 October 2023).

McMichael P (2023) Critical agrarian studies and crises of the world-historical present. *TheJournal of Peasant Studies* 50(2):725-757.

MEUCC (2023) 2022 Yılı Mahalli İdareler Genel Faaliyet Raporu. https://webdosya.csb.gov.tr/db/yerelyonetimler/icerikler/faal-yet-raporu_4-20230904213511.pdf (accessed 27 October 2023).

Milli Emlak (2023) *2022 Yılı Faaliyet Raporu*. 29.03.2023-m-ll-emlak-faal-yet-raporu-evren-yas-20230329135901.pdf (accessed 18 October 2023).

Ministry of Interior (2015) *2014 Yılı Yerel Yönetimler Faaliyet Raporu*.https://webdosya.csb.gov.tr/db/yerelyonetimler/

icerikler//2015_yili_faaliyet_raporu-20190429163013.pdf (accessed 27 October 2023).

Ministry of Trade (2023) En çok ihracat yapılan 20 fasıl. https://ticaret.gov.tr/istatistikler/bakanlik-istatistikleri/dis-ticaret-istatistikleri/eylul-ayi-dis-ticaret-istatistik-tablolari (accessed 7 October 2023).

Ministry of Trade (2020) Statistics: Sectoral reports: Food and agriculture: Fresh fruit and vegetables. https://www.trade.gov.tr/data/5b8fd55613b8761f041fee87/Fresh%20Fruits%20and%20Vegetables.pdf (accessed 6 October 2023).

MFAL (Ministry of Food, Agriculture and Livestock) (2014) *Introduction to Agriculture* (draft). Official Communication. 25 June.

Mosely WG 7 Battersby J (2020) The Vulnerability and Resilience of African Food Systems, Food Security and Nutrition in the Context of the COVID-19 Pandemic. *African Studies Review* 63(3):1-13.

Özden C, Bulut M, & Sen B (2022) Covid-19 and food security. *Turkish Journal of Agriculture – Food Science and Technology* 10(4):549-554.

Öztürk M, Jongerden J, & Hilton A (2018) The (re)production of the new peasantry in Turkey. *Journal of Rural Studies* 61(July):244-254.

Patel R (2013) The long green revolution. *Journal of Peasant Studies* 40: 1-63.

Peluso N.L & Lund C (2011) New Frontiers of Land Control. *The Journal of Peasant Studies* 38(4):667-81.

Reardon T, Barratt CB, Berdegue JA, et al. (2009) Agrifood Industry Transformation and Small Farmers in Developing Countries. *World Development* 37(11):1717-27.

Resmi Gazete (2014) Çiftçi Kayıt Sistemi Yönetmeliği. 27 May. No: 29012.

Retail Türkiye (2023) (September:175). https://retailturkiye.com/edergi/175/default.html (accessed 7 October 2023).

Retail Türkiye (2012) 'Yeni Hal Yasası, Sektörü Yeniden Yapılandırıyor', February, No. 35.

Rosset P (2000) *Lessons from the Green Revolution*. Oakland: Food First.

Silvasti T (2003) The Cultural Model of "the Good farmer" and the Environmental Question in Finland. *Agriculture and Human Values* 20:143-50.

SGK (2022) Kayıt Dışı İstihdam Oranı, 12 Ağustos. http://eski.sgk.gov.tr/wps/portal/sgk/tr/calisan/kayitdisi_istihdam/kayitdisi_istihdam_oranlari (accessed 23 October 2023).

Stone GD (2022) Surveillance Agriculture and Peasant Autonomy. *Journal of Agrarian Change* 22:608-631.

Tuğal C (2023) Politicized Megaprojects and Public Sector Interventions. *Critical Sociology* 49(3):457-473.

TÜİK (2023a) Tüketici Fiyat Endeksi, Ağustos 2023. https://data.TÜİK.gov.tr/Bulten/Index?p=T%C3%BCketici-Fiyat-Endeksi-A%C4%9Fustos-2023-49650&dil=1 (accessed 23 September 2023).

TÜİK (2023b) Hanehalkı tüketim harcaması, 2022. https://data.TÜİK.gov.tr/Bulten/Index?p=Hanehalki-Tuketim-Harcamasi-2022-49690 (accessed 1 October 2023).

TÜİK (2023c) Kimyasal gübre kullanımı, 2009-2022. ZSLm5UPkihz2yxwAqs5KHN2hr01VaV1FmjHkntH-9dTm8Sa919bL7MgAQsuH8ooqT.xls (accessed 24 July 2023).

TÜİK (2023d) Tarımsal ilaç kullanımı, 2006-2022.QGpcb5lHLaA8ulo_K9Zm0qnLPufU0Khtx3k_bNZ4c4yTkgdz0B7qi-4Vmyws7UAeX(2).xls (accessed 1 October 2023).

TÜİK (2023e) Yoksulluk ve yaşam koşulları istatistikleri, 2022. https://data.TÜİK.gov.tr/Bulten/Index?p=Yoksulluk-ve-Yasam-Kosullari-Istatistikleri-2022-49746 (accessed 1 October 2023).

TÜİK (2023f) Tahıllar ve diğer bitkisel ürünlerin alan ve üretim miktarları, 2001-2022. I9EGSBzAjL7AMeVmTzUP7rqmKRGZn8trI5HVU6261SKSg3bznh4FQ333OI59wZGQ.xls (accessed 1 October 2023).

TÜİK (2023g) İllere göre mevsimlik işçilere ödenen ortalama günlük ücretler ile sürekli işçilere ödenen ortalama aylık ücretler, 2022. https://data.TÜİK.gov.tr/Kategori/GetKategori?p=Tarim-111 (accessed 10 October 2023).

TÜİK (2023h) Hayvansal Üretim İstatistikleri, Haziran 2023. https://data.tuik.gov.tr/Bulten/Index?p=Hayvansal-Uretim-Istatistikleri-Haziran-2023-49680 (accessed 22 October 2023).

TÜİK (2022) Hayvansal Üretim İstatistikleri, 2022. https://data.tuik.gov.tr/Bulten/Index?p=Hayvansal-Uretim-Istatistikleri-2022-49682 (accessed 22 October 2023).

TÜİK (nd). Coğrafi istatistik portalı. https://cip.tuik.gov.tr/?il=6. (accessed 17 January 2024).

TZOB (2022) *ÇKS* Kaydı için Son Gün 31 Aralık 2022.https://www.tzob.org.tr/basin-odasi/haberler/cks-kaydi-icin-son-gun-31-aralik-2022. Accessed 27 July 2023 (accessed 20 August 2023).

Uğur A & Buruklar T (2022) Effects of Covid-19 pandemic on agri-food production and Farmers. *Food Science and Technology* 42:e19821.

UNCSN (2020) The COVID-19 pandemic is disrupting people's food environments: a resource list on Food Systems and Nutrition responses (unscn.org) (accessed 23 September 2023).

Walker B, Holling CS, Carpenter SR, et al. (2006) *Resilience Thinking*. Washington DC: Island Press.

Yılmaz H, Lauwers L, Buysse J, et al. (2019) Economic aspects of manure management and practices for sustainable agriculture in Turkey. *Present Environment & Sustainable Development* 13(1):249-263.

Zuntz AC, Klema M, Abdullateef S, et al. (2022) Syrian refugee labour and food insecurity in Middle Eastern agriculture during the early COVID-19 pandemic. *International Labour Review* 161(2):245-266.

Exceptional policies for exceptional situations? How COVID-19 revealed persisting precarity for seasonal migrant workers

Paper first received: 20 December 2023; Accepted: 06 April 2024; Published in final form: 15 December 2024
https://doi.org/10.48416/ijsaf.v30i1.571

Hilde BJØRKHAUG[1] and Jostein BROBAKK[2]

Abstract

When COVID-19 hit Norway and national borders were closed on 12 March 2020, farmers were ready to start preparations for a new growing season. Within a few weeks of the lockdown, the government implemented innovative economic measures to persuade unemployed Norwegians to work in agriculture, but this failed to produce the expected results. At the same time, it also created a narrative in which labour shortages were understood as a question of Norwegian food security and self-sufficiency. Migrant labour in agriculture was defined as 'crucial', and borders closed because of COVID-19 were opened for seasonal workers. In this article, we use the COVID-19 pandemic as a case for a critical discussion of the social position of migrant labour in agriculture and the use of exceptional measures in the agrifood sector. We consider how migrant workers came to be depicted by the government as necessary to Norwegian food security, to justify their exclusion from basic protection during the pandemic, thus contributing to their precarity as workers. Based on an analysis of media outputs, political decisions, and policies, as well as statements and publications from stakeholder groups, we show how the Norwegian government mirrored the sector's economic and production interests and used the prospect of food insecurity as an argument for allowing exemptions from the seasonal immigration ban for workers in the 2020-2022 period. The discussion is based on conceptualisations from the literature on agricultural exceptionalism, food security, and self-sufficiency, as well as precarity among migrant labourers.

[1] Department of Sociology and Political Science, NTNU, Norway
[2] RURALIS, Institute for Rural and Regional Research, Norway

Corresponding author: Hilde Bjørkhaug, hilde.bjorkhaug@ntnu.no

Biographical notes

Hilde Bjørkhaug is professor of sociology at NTNU, Norway, with a special interest in the sociology of agriculture and food. Her research areas include agricultural restructuring, politics and power relations in the food system, sustainability, and animal welfare.

Jostein Brobakk holds a PhD in political science from NTNU in Trondheim, Norway. Brobakk works as a senior researcher at Ruralis – Institute for Rural and Regional Research, on topics such as climate change and agricultural policy and politics, and rural and regional policy.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to thank two anonymous reviewers for their critical and constructive comments on the article, which have helped to improve the quality of our work. We thank Sabrina Ramet for the thorough copy-editing of the manuscript. We are grateful to the Balsillie School of International Affairs and the University of Waterloo, Canada for the use of their facilities while doing research and writing the article. We would also like to thank Sofie Bjørkhaug for help with literature search and editing. The research has not received external funding.

INTRODUCTION

When COVID-19 hit Norway and national borders were closed on 12 March 2020, farmers were ready to start preparations for a new growing season. It quickly became clear that farmers in Norwegian fruit and vegetable production worried about access to migrant seasonal workers to get the plants in the soil and harvest the crop after the growing season. Within a few weeks of the lockdown, the government implemented innovative economic measures to persuade unemployed Norwegians to work in agriculture, but this failed to produce the expected results. At the same time, it created a narrative in which labour shortages were understood as a question of Norwegian food security and self-sufficiency. Migrant labour in agriculture was defined as 'crucial', and borders closed because of COVID-19 were opened for seasonal workers.

In this article, we use the COVID-19 pandemic as a case for a critical discussion of the social position of migrant labour in agriculture, and the use of exceptional measures in the agrifood sector. We consider how migrant workers came to be depicted by the government as necessary to Norwegian food security, to justify their exclusion from basic protections during the pandemic, thus contributing to their precarity as workers. Based on an analysis of media outputs, political decisions, and policies, as well as statements and publications from stakeholder groups, we show how the Norwegian government mirrored the sector's economic and production interests. It used the prospect of food insecurity as an argument for allowing exemptions from the seasonal immigration ban for workers in the 2020-2022 period. We argue that this is an example of an exception to policy.

The use of migrant workers is a relatively marginal phenomenon and affected around 10 % of Norwegian farms at the start of the pandemic, mainly in the fruit and vegetable sector (Zahl-Thanem and Melås, 2022). Despite this, politicians, large agricultural coops, and the Farmers Union argued that, unless the government allowed agricultural labour, Norwegian self-sufficiency would be severely impaired (Farmers Union, 2020a). This article contributes to the literature on migrant labour, precarity in agriculture, and agricultural exceptionalism by showing how the Norwegian government implemented measures favouring a small group of producers and distributors by framing these interests as being of national importance. This was done at the expense of the workers involved and their protection during a global pandemic. The discussion is based on conceptualisations from the literature on agricultural exceptionalism (Skogstad, 1998; Daugbjerg and Swinbank, 2009), food security, and self-sufficiency (Clapp et al., 2022), as well as precarity among migrant labourers (Kalleberg, 2018).

The article is structured as follows. First, we review the literature on agriculture-related studies of the COVID-19 pandemic effects, before turning to conceptual work on agricultural exceptionalism, migrant workers and precarity, food security and food self-sufficiency. We then present the methodology, data used, and analysis, before discussing our results and offering some conclusions.

COVID-19 EFFECTS IN THE AGRIFOOD SECTOR

The COVID-19 pandemic had several severe impacts on the global agrifood sector and acted as a catalyst for the reemergence of some old challenges. Food production in general slowed down and logistics came to a halt, as did the distribution and sales of food (Rahimi et al., 2022). In regions heavily dependent on agribusiness imports and exports, for instance in Central America, Mexico (Lopez-Ridaura et al., 2021), and the Caribbean (Blazy et. Al., 2021), concerns over the lack of labour with a negative impact on food security received heightened attention. An Asian study reported a renewed public policy focus on regional production of food staples and welfare, emphasising that small farming systems were found to be more resilient to this kind of shock than large export-oriented systems (Dixon et al., 2021). Darnhofer (2021) reflected on how a crisis can create a window of opportunity for changes in production systems, marketing, and food sales such as shorter food supply chains and direct sales. A common theme in several of the 'COVID-19 publications' is the need for increased diversity in global and regional food systems, to boost resilience and food security. On

the human side, COVID-19 abruptly affected the mobility of farm workers and those employed in the food industry, and increased exposure to risks for those still migrating despite the closure of most borders (Clapp and Moseley, 2020; Constance, et al. 2023).

On the other hand, despite the multiple negative effects of COVID-19, others pointed out the relative stability of food production and the functionality of global and regional food systems. In a European study, Helfenstein et al. (2022) found no real COVID-19 impact on agricultural output. Although specialised, intensive farms faced higher vulnerabilities from the pandemic, whilst small and medium-sized farms and farms with diversified production were less affected. Måren et al. (2022) found that increased diversification of markets and labour acted as adaptive responses across nations as different as Norway, the US, and China. In addition, migrant agricultural workers were exempt from travel restrictions during COVID-19 in several countries including Norway, removing a potential source of reduced food production (Stephens et al., 2020).

The dependency on migrant labour in production and processing became increasingly visible during the pandemic, leading many countries to search for policies to mitigate labour shortages, for instance by labelling migrant workers as 'essential', thereby qualifying them for travel across otherwise closed borders. In a critical comment, Reid et al. (2021) and Allison et al. (2021) warned that labelling migrant workers as essential overshadows the already precarious situation in which these workers find themselves, with the added expectation of being mobile. This also includes factors such as high entry costs, quarantines during the pandemic, often crowded workplaces and housing with contamination risks, and the fact that many migrant workers were not allowed to return to their home countries when borders started to close. In their review of Nordic measures designed to retain the labour of 'essential' migrant workers, Kuns, et al. (2023) underline that the aforementioned challenges were experienced particularly by migrants from outside the Schengen Area, i.e. Asia.

THEORETICAL AND CONCEPTUAL PERSPECTIVES

Exceptionalism and the Norwegian agricultural regime

Policy exceptionalism, and later post-exceptionalism, are broadly discussed in the academic literature on agriculture over the last decades (Skogstad, 1998; Grant, 2012; Rodman et al., 2016; Daugbjerg et al., 2017; Daugbjerg and Feindt 2017; Farsund and Daugbjerg 2017; Greer 2017; Attorp and McAreavey, 2020). Skogstad (1998: 467) describes how agriculture differs from other sectors due to unpredictable production conditions under varying weather conditions, and farmers' relatively low income despite continual efforts to increase efficiency whilst producing goods and services of national interest. Agricultural exceptionalism can also be described as a belief-system assigning regulations, institutions, and policies to an economic sector due to its uniqueness (Daugbjerg and Feindt, 2017). This uniqueness is expressed in several ways and has several sources, including special market and production conditions for agricultural products and producers because of their contribution to national goals such as food security and farm incomes (Moyer and Josling, 2002; Daugbjerg and Swinbank, 2009). Exceptional arrangements and policies are often expressed in measures such as producer interests being given precedence over consumer interests, the transfer of subsidies from taxpayers to farmers, and protectionist arrangements in international trade (agreements) (Grant, 1995: 156).

Norwegian agriculture is organized around a set of institutions and arrangements aimed at fulfilling national goals across several sectors. Its governance structure is highly corporative, in a system where the Farmers' Union and the Smallholders' Union together with state representatives play a large role in policy development and market regulation. Exceptionalism is rooted in the corporative system and government institutions (Farsund and Daugbjerg, 2017). The main pillars in the model are high tariffs to protect domestic production, market regulation, a quota system for the most important products such as dairy and red meat, and a system of production subsidies to farmers. The subsidy level as well as quotas and target prices are negotiated annually between representatives from the Ministry of Agriculture and Food and the two farmers' unions

(Farmers' Union and Smallholders' Union) (Almås, 2004; 2016). This corporative arrangement gives the farmers' organizations significant influence over agricultural policy formulation. However, wage levels for hired labour in the sector, and minimum pay for employees in the food industry, are not part of this corporative system.

In the Norwegian context, agriculture produces public goods and services of national value, and the main policy instruments regulating the agricultural sector have broad political and societal support. An established policy goal is 'to ensure Norway's population enough and safe food produced from Norwegian natural resources' (Hurdalsplattformen, 2023). This goal refers to national self-sufficiency in major categories, in particular red meat, dairy, and eggs. Norwegian natural resources refer to non-imported animal feed. In 2022, the official self-sufficiency rate in calories, based on Norwegian resources, was 39% (NAA, 2023). Despite its low self-sufficiency rate, Norway is not considered food insecure by international standards, because of its economic status.

Food security and self-sufficiency

Food security can be understood in several different ways, and the current FAO definition reads:
A situation that exists when all people, at all times, have physical, social and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food that meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life (FAO, 2023).

This definition rests on four pillars or dimensions: food availability, economic and physical access to food, food utilisation, and food stability over time. It has, according to Clapp et al. (2022), become a canon with the UN Committee on World Food Security and the UN FAO. Yet Clapp et al. (2022), as members of the High-Level Panel of Experts of the Committee on World Food Security, have argued that the current UN definition of food security has become too focused on food insufficiency. Clapp suggests adding sustainability, to broaden the scope of food security over time and into the future, as well as individual and collective agency, to allow people the opportunity to have control over their access to food.

In the most recent FAO report 'The state of food security and nutrition in the world' (2023), these concepts have been added to explain the definition of food security but are yet to be formally agreed. The concept of food security has gone from addressing the urgent need to feed the world in the post-World War II era, via a decade of including nutrition in addition to volume in the 1990s, to incorporating sustainability. In 2000, the UN Millennium declared its ambition to reduce poverty and hunger with Goal 1 in the Millennium Development Goals (MDG), and its commitment to halve the proportion of people who suffer from hunger by 2015. Acknowledging the contrary, that is, a rise in global hunger since 2015, the current Goal 2 of the UN Sustainability Developments Goals of 2030 reads 'creating a world free of hunger by 2030' (UNSDG, 2023).
The definition of food self-sufficiency overlaps to some extent with that of food security and refers to a country that produces more food or calories than it consumes (Clapp, 2015). By evaluating these two dimensions – food security and food self-sufficiency – separately, as Clapp (2015) does, one can rate countries' performance. For instance, countries that have a low self-sufficiency rate can be food secure due to their high-income levels and purchasing power, and their ability to import the food needed to meet dietary needs. Norway fits this category. Others may have a high self-sufficiency rate but low food security due to low diversity in their productions and/or an inability to distribute what is being produced; and/or they may be exporting too much of their production.

During the 2008 financial crisis, several countries advocated (exercising agency) to increase production volumes and thus self-sufficiency levels to safeguard their populations and to minimise international food trade (Brobakk and Almås, 2011). Norway was one of the countries that took the lead in increasing the focus on food self-sufficiency (Brekk, 2010). One goal was to secure Norwegian agricultural production in competition with cheaper production elsewhere (Bjørkhaug et al., 2012). Whilst food self-sufficiency is a

part of countries' national security policy, some also seek to secure or increase their agricultural production and protect rural areas – a policy that is rooted in the response to the 1972-74 food crisis and explicitly in the 1974 World Food Conference. As we saw above, this blossomed again in the aftermath of the food and financial crisis of 2007-08 (Brobakk and Almås, 2011; Farsund and Daugbjerg, 2017).

The global food security and self-sufficiency debates are thus about both production volumes available to the global population, and fair distribution to ensure everyone's rights, as the FAO sees it. From this perspective, political interventions in global markets on behalf of global food security can be seen as an illustration of the idea that agriculture is exceptional and requires exceptional measures. Former UN special rapporteur on the right to food, Olivier De Schutter, argued that such interventionist measures are necessary since '...food moves where purchasing power is highest, not where needs are most urgent' (De Schutter 2011, as cited in Farsund and Daugbjerg, 2017: 348).

Migrant labour and precarity in agriculture

In many instances and areas, the pandemic made it evident just how dependent modern food production is on access to seasonal workers, and reduced labour mobility during the COVID lockdown became an increasing concern. This dependence with its pervasive effects on job and economic security, family, and the overall well-being of people has become a central feature in most rich western democracies (Kalleberg, 2018), including traditionally family-based agricultural regimes such as the Norwegian one (Bjørkhaug and Blekesaune, 2007; 2008). The transition to a corporate and neoliberal global agrifood regime has intensified the precariousness of the labour serving it – both in practice and in policy (see e.g. McMichael, 2005). Wolf and Bonnano (2016) point to the increased informalisation of labour as a key dimension of modern agriculture. Workers are also often poorly informed about labour rights and often face language barriers. Further, workers might be hired through agencies responding to shifting demands in various labour markets, thus cementing their informality and lack of integration in local communities (Constance et al., 2023; Rye and Scott, 2018). In the US poultry industry, 'white men in unions' are replaced by unorganized women, minorities, and immigrants (Constance et al., 2023), a process that reduces production costs but also removes workers' safety net (Rye and Scott, 2018).

Clapp et al. (2022) are among those who have warned about the extent and precarity of hired migrant labour in the agrifood sector, and the increasing dependence on it. Migrant labour is mainly seasonal and can be brought in 'just in time', which also defines migrant workers as separate from the traditional, non-migrating labour force. Precarious workers are described by some as 'invisible' in the globalised neoliberal economy (Ferragina, et al., 2022; Stachowski and Fialkowska, 2020), or 'doubly absent' due to both lack of interaction with the local community where they work, and lost labour market opportunities in their home country (Sæther and Stachowski, 2023). Rye and Scott (2018) describe how migration in the food sector has changed the rural realm of Europe through a process where domestic labour has gradually become global. This globalisation of the countryside (Woods, 2017) and the emergence of the precarious cosmopolitan (Woods, 2018) has happened simultaneously with manual labour, in general, being phased out of agriculture, and the 'traditional' family-oriented farm based on family labour being replaced by 'modernised' or 'professionalised' farms with the farmer as the main labourer (Bjørkhaug and Blekesaune, 2007; 2008). In Norwegian horticulture, family farm labour has been systematically replaced by wage labour in some instances, and domestic workers replaced by international low-wage migrant workers over the past three decades (Rye et al., 2018). On Norwegian fruit and vegetable farms the migrant workers are seasonal, and in that way temporary, although some do return to the same farm year after year.

A Norwegian study highlights a conflicting perspective that, in spite of working under lower standards than the regular workforce, migrants consider their work conditions 'acceptable' and compare them favourably with conditions in their home country (Rye and Andrzejewska, 2010). The farmers hiring seasonal workers often justify the situation by stating that 'they don't earn much either' (Scott and Rye, 2021). Whilst this can be understood as a legitimation for keeping the cost of labour in the agricultural industry as low as possible, the

ability to send money to family in the home country can also be understood as empowering for the migrants.

The Norwegian labour regime

The governance structure in the Norwegian labour regime has corporatist features, not unlike in the agricultural regime. Both major labour rights and salary levels in the main economic sectors are negotiated annually or bi-annually between representatives for the workers, the employers, and the state. Negotiations are carried out sector by sector, and the workers are represented by national labour union representatives for the sector in question (Nymoen, 2017). Since many sectors decide on minimum wage levels for groups of workers, there is no legislated general minimum wage level in Norway. For instance, in 2023, the minimum wage for unskilled workers with little or no experience in hotels and services, aquaculture and construction was NOK 191, NOK 206, and NOK 215 respectively, as a result of accords between the employer organisations and labour unions in those sectors. For hired labour in agriculture, on the other hand, minimum pay is currently at NOK 145 per hour (Arbeidstilsynet, 2023), substantially lower than for other groups. However, this is more like a recommendation since agriculture has its separate corporatist governance model where workers' rights are decided. Labour rights in agriculture – meaning hired labour and not farmers and farm owners – and wage levels can differ substantially from other economic sectors. One source of these exceptional labour policies in agriculture is the narrative in which access to migrant workers and Norwegian self-sufficiency – a main national political goal – are tightly linked.

METHODOLOGY AND DATA

Qualitative data constitute the main source for the analysis in this article. We reconstruct a timeline of events from 2020 to 2021 and conduct an analysis of major decisions and statements as described in government archives available online, policy documents (annual budget documents, by-law and regulation changes), news articles, excerpts from TV programs, and agriculture organizations' positions. In addition, we present statistics on the use of seasonal migrant labour in Norwegian agriculture.

We made use of several archives to retrieve data that could inform analyses and discussions of how migrant workers came to be depicted as necessary to Norwegian food security through government discourses justifying their exclusion from basic protection during the pandemic, thus contributing to their precarity as workers. First, a search was conducted in the digital database Retriever for seasonal labour ('sesongarbeidskraft') AND (farming ('jordbruk') OR agriculture ('landbruk') OR fruit ('frukt') OR vegetables ('grønt')) from 30.12.2019 to 13.11.2023. We also conducted a Retriever[1] search in more than 2,000 print and digital editorial media, radio and television files. The search yielded 142 articles. These were read and coded in a time-structured and issue-based scheme to reflect the chronology of events. Additionally, the Farmers' Union collected 70 articles relating to Covid-19 digitally on their website,[2] the first of which was published on 10 March 2019 and the last on 21 September 2021. Finally, Government historical archives[3] gave access to all speeches, texts, questions and answers about Covid-19. These were read, coded, and extracted into a time narrative on agriculture, seasonal work, and Covid-19.

The methods used for the article's narrative analysis are inspired by situational analysis (Clarke et al., 2015), which 'allows researchers to draw together discourse and agency, action and structure, image, text and context, history and the present moment – to analyse complex stations of enquiry' (Clarke, 2003: 554), as well as the 'revealed dependence' of agriculture on migrant labour. The unit of analysis is the situation per se, the research question(s) address the various elements identified within these situations, and the discourse analysis highlights how reality is constructed, maintained, and/or challenged (see e.g. Berger and Luckmann, 1967). The method is systematic and helps structure the issues at stake, the human and non-human elements that are evident in the situation, the relations between actors (human and non-human), and the discourses.

[1] https://www.retrievergroup.com/product-research
[2] https://www.bondelaget.no/tema/koronaviruset/
[3] https://www.regjeringen.no/en/historical-archive/id115322/

For instance, the question of defining migrant workers as essential to agriculture is part of a discursive creation in texts and as narratives that presents mindsets in use and actions taken.
The analytical method consists of three steps. The first step is to identify which actors are involved in the situation and what role they might have. The second step is to reveal the central issues and topics in the situation. The third step is to analyse how actors and issues are positioned. In this process, the concept of discourse helps us reveal, interpret, and communicate on how an issue arrives at the decision-making table, which power relations are active, and which elements are ignored or silenced.

Excerpts from news and media are presented to illustrate which actors were publicly active and which ones were invited to participate and form the discourse. The dominant actors during the initial stages of the pandemic had a huge impact on what turned out to be the dominant narrative in the question of food security and self-sufficiency. The analysis is presented through two distinct narratives, the 'business-as-usual' narrative and the 'access-to-labour-being-a-big-challenge' narrative. The latter is the dominant narrative and was elaborated through three measures that were constructed to solve the problem. Before turning to what became the dominant narrative in Norway during COVID-19 – the link between lack of seasonal workers, i.e. migrants, and food security and self-sufficiency (Farmers' Union, 2020b) – we look at the statistics on the use of migrant labour on Norwegian farms.

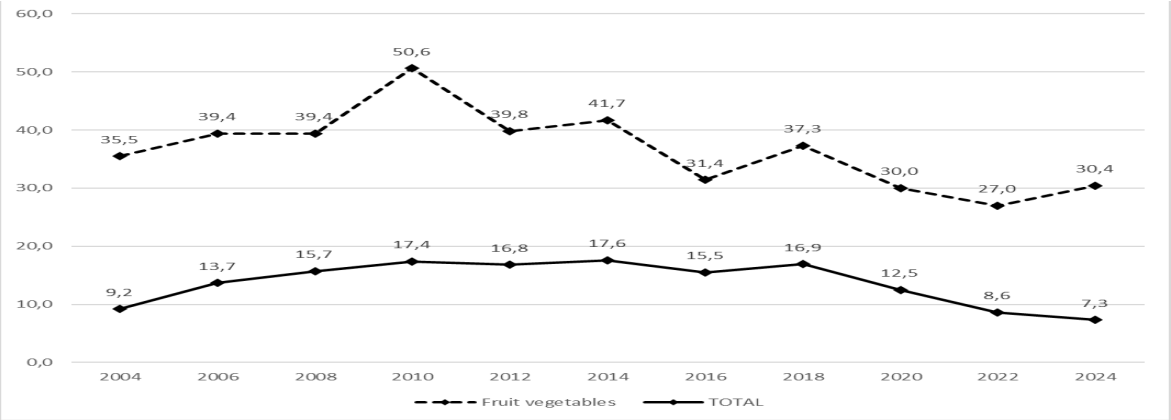
Migrant workers in Norwegian agriculture

Norway is fully integrated into the EU market via the European Economic Agreement (EEA). With the EU enlargement in 2004, EU citizens from Central and Eastern Europe could also access labour markets in the EU/EEA area, to the benefit of bargain-winning markets and the cost of labour (Moses, 2021). Unprecedented numbers of workers migrated to more affluent parts of the EU, including Norway (McAreavey, 2017; Rye and Scott, 2018). Access to the EU's inner market allowed for increased access to migrant labour for Norwegian agriculture (Rye and Slettebak, 2020), with an increase in both the number and share of farms hiring seasonal labour from abroad. From the mid-2010s however, the numbers started to decline, both in agriculture and in other sectors. One reason for these changes was reduced wealth and income differences between Norway and the migrants' home countries (ibid.).

The number of Norwegian farms using seasonal labour and their dependence on migrant workers have been monitored in the Trends in Norwegian Agriculture (Trends hereafter) survey since 2004. Trends is a biannual representative survey on Norwegian farmers conducted by Ruralis (Zahl-Thanem and Melås, 2020; 2022).[4] The 2024 survey (for the production year 2023) shows that for Norwegian agriculture overall, 7% of farms hired migrant workers, that is, 2,700 out of 37,561 farms (Figure 1). This is down from a peak in 2014 when close to 18% (7,744 out of 43,022) of farms hired workers from abroad.

[4] Respondents in Trends are drawn randomly from a national database on farm properties and primary producers. On average, between 1,100 and 1,800 farmers have returned their questionnaires every year. The average return rates for the period 2004-2022 vary between 55 and 34 percent. Although the response rate has gradually declined over the years, representation and validity are still considered good (see Zahl-Thanem and Melås, 2020; 2022).

Figure 1. Percentage of farms hiring immigrant workers. Total, fruit/vegetable sector, 2004 to 2024



Source: Trends in Norwegian Agriculture

The production sector with the largest share of migrant workers is fruit and vegetable production, similar to the situation in other countries. The latest figures show that one-third of all fruit and vegetable farms depended on migrant workers, down from a peak in 2010 when half of Norwegian fruit and vegetable farms hired migrant workers. In absolute numbers, this corresponds to around a thousand farms in 2010 and 700 in 2024 (production year 2023).

The Trends survey also contains value-related questions, i.e., attitudes to migrant workers and worker rights. In 2004, 40% of Norwegian farmers agreed with the statement 'We should rely more on migrant workers in the future' (authors' translation from Norwegian). By 2022, this had dropped to 29%. Furthermore, in 2004, 37% of Norwegian farmers found it acceptable that migrant workers in agriculture were paid less than Norwegian farm workers. In 2016, 23% were of the same opinion (Zahl-Thanem and Melås, 2022). Although farms in Norway have become fewer and larger due to restructuring, and the average number of migrant workers per farm has increased, it is fair to say that this is a declining trend. It is also evident that farmers' attitudes are changing, and that there is a reduced acceptance of lower standards for migrant workers.

Narrative on numbers

When it comes to the number of migrant workers in Norway, both currently and historically, it is more difficult to obtain accurate figures. Numbers are not recorded reliably in Trends, and there is no easily accessible public register. The lack of accurate data on migrant workers in agriculture became evident during the pandemic.

Based on the number and content of news, lobby and policy documents related to migrant labour during the COVID-19 period, there was a public impression that many farm workers were needed to secure Norwegian food production and maintain the self-sufficiency rate. An early estimate of 100,000 seasonal migrant workers needed in Norway was debated on the national TV channel NRK on 16 March (NRK, 2020a). This was however only an estimate and was not based on public statistics or farm reporting. A few days later, the Farmers' Union stipulated that the number was 20,000, arguing that migrant workers should be classified as 'experts', mainly within fruit and vegetable production, hence qualifying for free border passage under Norwegian regulations during the pandemic (Farmers' Union, 2020a). On 26 May 2020, the national fruit and vegetable coop, Gartnerhallen, stipulated that 15,000 workers were needed to obtain pre-COVID-19 production levels (Hatlevik, 2020). On 30 March 2020, the Minister of Agriculture and Food stated that the fruit and vegetable industry needed 'many thousands' (Government 2020a). On 1 April 2020, the Norwegian Directorate of Immigration reported figures from 2019 that showed EEC/EU citizens made up the largest group of seasonal workers (an unspecified number), but that 3,700 workers from countries outside the EU/EEA area came to Norway for seasonal work, 70% of them to work in agriculture. Half of these were Vietnamese (1,250, author's calculation) and 30% Ukrainians (750, author's calculation). Statistics Norway (SSB) figures for the 2020 season confirmed these patterns: most foreign seasonal labour comes from Eastern Europe (Poland 47%, Lithuania 13%), 10% from Ukraine, and 10% from Vietnam. These groups work mainly in

horticulture (Gundersen and Myrli, 2021).

Based on these various numbers and incomplete public statistics, we estimate that the number of migrant workers in Norwegian agriculture at the start of the pandemic was a lot lower than what the agricultural sector, government, and the main news media reported. Furthermore, these migrants were directed to a small and specialised part of Norwegian food production, not to most Norwegian farms.

The 'business as usual' narrative

Norway is dependent on imports for more than half of the calories consumed by its population but is self-sufficient year-round in dairy products, red and white meat, eggs and fish. However, much of this production depends on imported proteins in feed concentrate. According to the nation's largest fruit and vegetable wholesaler Bama, and the fruit and vegetable coop Gartnerhallen, Norway is 34% self-sufficient in fruit and vegetables (annual average). In season (May to October), domestic producers cover 70% of national fruit and vegetable demand (Bama, 2020).

The COVID-19 lock-down affected all economic sectors. Hospital capacity and the spread of the virus were key issues in national risk assessment and dominated the news coverage and public debate. However, attention was also drawn to food security and self-sufficiency-related issues. During the first months of the pandemic, Norwegian authorities communicated two mutually exclusive narratives simultaneously. On the one hand, they reassured the public that food production would continue with little disturbance and with no reduced access to food in the stores. On the other hand, through a set of statements and regulations, the authorities argued that access to migrant seasonal labour would be crucial to uphold domestic food production levels.

The Ministry of Trade, Industry and Fisheries (NFD, responsible for food supply) and the Ministry of Agriculture and Food (LMD, responsible for food production) developed the narrative that, despite closed borders and disturbances in major agriculture value chains, there would be 'enough food for everybody', that 'food production runs as normal' (Government, 2020, b and c), and that access to imported goods would not be reduced (NRK, 2020b). The Norwegian Agricultural Agency followed up this reassuring narrative by reporting that the Norwegian food supply, both from domestic production and from imports, was functioning well, despite logistical challenges and value chain disturbances due to the pandemic (Fafo Østforum, 2020). In May 2020, the Foreign Minister I. Søreide presented a declaration in support of the multilateral trading system and the WTO's central role in cooperation and solidarity to ensure the supply of goods and services in the fight against COVID-19 (together with 42 other ministers) (Government, 2020d).

When presenting the national budget on 12 June 2020, the government stated that agriculture had been 'relatively little affected by the [pandemic] compared to several other industries', and that agriculture as a whole 'is not experiencing a drop in sales, perhaps rather a certain temporary increase in the market due to the halt in cross-border trade', except for industries that deliver to hotels and restaurants (Horeca) due to reduced access to seasonal labour (Government, 2020e). Based on official statements, one can thus assume that Norwegian food security was perceived as good in terms of availability and access for the population, owing to own production and good trade relations, but also that self-sufficiency was somewhat affected.

Dependency narrative: Access to labour is a big challenge

Alongside the narrative of undisturbed food supply and sustained food security for the Norwegian population, both the government and food sector representatives constructed a second and opposite narrative: food production (and self-sufficiency) would be harmed if the borders were completely closed. On 16 March 2020, fruit and vegetable sector representatives called for a national effort to secure the Norwegian food supply (Bama, 2020). When several sectors had to let their workers go due to the lockdown, agriculture was calling for more labour. On 17 March 2020, the Farmers' Union established a special task force to deal with labour shortages due to border closures, and labour recruitment became a priority (Farmers' Union, 2020b).

Together with food industry organisations, the Farmers' Union put forward three different proposals to mitigate the negative effects of border closures.

The first proposal was to intensify recruitment of domestic labour, with students and laid-off workers as target groups. Because Norwegians would not be willing to accept wage levels normally offered to migrant workers, work conditions and wages had to be improved. Hence, on 23 March 2020, the Farmers' Union submitted a proposal to three ministries to establish a free pass for Norwegian workers who had been dismissed or laid off due to COVID-19 (Farmers' Union, 2020c). This scheme was needed to remedy the fact that the minimum wage in agriculture was lower than unemployment benefits. The government's response was to allow workers laid off due to COVID-19 to maintain their unemployment benefits whilst at the same time receiving minimum pay for working in agriculture. The scheme was adopted on 31 March 2020, and continued in 2021 (Government, 2020h). However, many farmers protested this scheme, claiming that Norwegian workers lacked the expertise and experience of migrant workers, many of whom had a 20-year record as seasonal labour. One farmer characterised Norwegian farm labour as 'lacking respect' for work, and 'too comfortable' to be reliable (Bondebladet, 2020).

The free-pass arrangement was also met with criticism from outside agriculture. Trade unions argued that one reason for foreign labour dependence was the wage level and the de facto social-dumping-conditions in their contracts (Vermes, 2020). Former agriculture researcher, S.A. Lie, pointed out a mismatch in the farm sector, where the sector depends on a planned economy with production subsidies, but where farmers as employers behave like neoliberals (Vermes, 2020). An additional concern was that, with more Norwegians with higher salaries entering agriculture, food prices would increase, and farm incomes would drop. In a statement, then Minister of Agriculture and Food, O. Bollestad, replied that wage-related matters were to be solved by the parties involved (employer representatives and the unions) in the labour regime. The role of the government, Bollestad stated, was not to intervene in wage negotiations, but to facilitate the availability of enough labour for agriculture (Government, 2021a).

Despite the free pass scheme, labour demands were not met, particularly in the fruit and vegetable sector. Therefore, a second proposal from the agricultural sector emerged: exemptions from travel bans for migrant labour in agriculture. On 21 March 2020, the government was working on changes to allow those migrant workers already situated in Norway to extend their stay (Government, 2020f). The main argument presented was that the fruit and vegetable sector was a specialised industry that needed labour with expertise and experience or, Minister Bollestad had put it: 'We need foreign labour with relevant and appropriate skills' (Government, 2020f). On 30 March 2020, the Minister of Justice allowed exemptions for travel bans for migrant workers from EU/EEA countries so that they could 'more easily contribute' to Norwegian agriculture (TV2, 2020). A travel requirement was a two-week quarantine. On 9 April 2020, the borders were also opened to labour with non-critical functions from the EU/EEA zone, and from 6 May 2020, all foreign seasonal workers who were working in agriculture could enter Norway (Government, 2020g). In June 2020, the borders opened for a period for everyone who was going to work or study in Norway, and many believed the COVID-19 situation was under control.

In January 2021, the borders closed again in the second wave of COVID-19-related restrictions. This time, exceptions to the travel ban could be made only if strictly necessary to ensure continuity of critical societal functions (Government, 2021c). This was seemingly a much tougher regulation than that of the previous year. On 25 February 2021, the government and the agricultural sector again realised that access to seasonal workers would be a huge challenge and started working on mitigating measures. On 26 March 2021, new regulations allowed foreign labour crucial for maintaining 'sound operations in the fruit and vegetable sector' to apply for entry despite border closures (Government, 2021d). On 15 April 2021, there was a 'no' to opening borders, but shortly afterwards, on 21 April 2021, a temporary change was agreed, for the renewal of residence permits to seasonal workers already staying in Norway during the COVID-19 pandemic. Borders were closed for longer than in 2021.

On 5 July 2021 there was a border relief for entry of foreign labour. Several countries had already been granted entry based on a traffic light scheme that provided information about infection rates in each country. On 17 June 2021, warnings were issued of a 30 per cent strawberry 'deficit' in the market due to a lack of seasonal workers. When the opening of the borders for seasonal migrating workers was partly justified in terms of skills developed from work in previous years, it turned out that the authorities also had to change the requirement from a minimum of three years of previous experience to a minimum of one year, to obtain enough labour. Hence, the expertise argument was ultimately set aside.

On 20 September 2021, a new scheme was introduced to allow seasonal workers to stay in Norway for the rest of the year if they could not return home due to entry restrictions in their home country. This was effectively an automatic extension of their work visa period (Government 2021e), before most entry restrictions were lifted towards the end of the year.

A third measure from early 2020 was a risk-reducing financial support scheme for the fruit and vegetable sector. In a letter to the Ministry of Agriculture and Food, the Farmers' Union and the fruit and vegetable sector argued that it was important to start spring planting from a societal food supply security perspective. A scheme that included compensation for crop losses in labour-intensive fruit and vegetable productions due to a lack of workers was established in April 2020 and would be valid for the rest of the year. A similar scheme was established in August 2020, applicable for the 2021-season (Government, 2020e). Numbers from the Norwegian Agricultural Agency (private correspondence) showed 12 applications submitted under this risk-relief scheme for the 2020 season, of which 11 came from berry producers and one from a vegetable producer. For the 2021 season, 37 applications were submitted: 29 from berry producers, 7 from vegetable producers, and one from a fruit producer. These are low figures compared to the number of farms in total cultivating that produce. One explanation might be that the access-to-labour-schemes were so efficient that losses due to labour shortages were not an issue. Another explanation is that possible losses were covered by other arrangements.

DISCUSSION

In this article we have considered how migrant workers came to be seen in government discourses as sufficiently necessary to Norwegian food security to justify their exclusion from basic protections imposed during the pandemic, thereby contributing to their precarity as workers. We have analysed COVID-19 policies to show how the government's handling of migrant labour as regards food security and Norwegian self-sufficiency entailed exceptions in the Norwegian agricultural regime.

Despite reassurances to the public that food production could continue undisturbed and that access to food would not be compromised, the Norwegian government and the agricultural sector opted for regulations to allow seasonal labour to enter during a period of heavy travel restrictions. This 'two-sided communication' from the government during COVID-19 was quite striking. In one sense, both statements turned out to be true at the same time. For most Norwegians, access to food, both in volume and in quality, remained more or less the same during the pandemic despite disturbances to global value chains and periods of labour shortages in Norwegian agriculture. At the same time, farmers had periodic problems linked to access to labour. Since migrant workers, particularly in the fruit and vegetable sector, were defined early on as 'essential', labour shortages did not hit hard. The recruitment scheme aimed at Norwegian students and laid-off workers also helped to reduce potential disturbances in food production. Yet the government, agricultural organisations, and food industry representatives created a narrative that linked access to migrant workers and food self-sufficiency, to justify the implementation of measures that could qualify as exceptional. Important actors in creating this narrative were the Farmers' Union, with its 6,000 members, Bama, which is the largest fruit and vegetable wholesaler in Norway, and the Gartnerhallen co-op. During the pandemic, representatives from a relatively small part of the agricultural sector engaged in energetic lobbying, and on several occasions the

Minister of Food and Agriculture argued along the same lines as the organisations and industry representatives. In this article, we have shown how the government responded to these organisations' requests and interests and established free pass schemes that made it easier for unemployed Norwegians to work in agriculture and eventually allowed migrant workers to enter despite closed borders. Both politicians and the agricultural sector defended exemptions regarding food security and self-sufficiency. Compared to the relatively low and declining share of Norwegian farms hiring migrant workers – around 10% at the start of the pandemic – it is fair to say that a small but powerful part of the Norwegian society and the agricultural sector achieved far bigger concessions than their size would otherwise suggest.

Claiming exceptionalism

Reviewing both long-term regulations such as the minimum wage and exemptions agreed during COVID-19, there is clear evidence that Norwegian agriculture is still subject to policy exceptions. Along the lines suggested by Skogstad (1998) and Daugbjerg and Swinbank (2009), agriculture was treated as a unique economic sector of special national interest or importance. In the narrative that became dominant, the matter of national importance was the threat to food security, with a potential labour deficit as the root cause. The fact that the government simultaneously communicated that food access and supply were not in danger, did not change the outcome: exceptions to travel restrictions were deemed necessary to mitigate a potential threat to national food security. What the special arrangements during COVID-19 – measures aimed at the labour situation and risk-relieving financial schemes – had in common were the interests of the producers and the food industry. Agriculture was given attention and enjoyed policies few other sectors could hope for, thus confirming the conclusions of Grant (1995) who underlined a central feature in agricultural exceptionalism, namely that industry and producer interests are given precedence in policy making (Grant 1995). The regulations and policies put in place, and the position of the main actors in the agricultural sector, reflected the notion that institutional settings in a regime affect policymaking. In regimes where exceptionalism is institutionalised, measures and policies are sheltered by the regime, and when new policy areas or challenges emerge, as in a pandemic, there is a tendency for the existing regime to shape the various public policy outcomes (Farsund and Daugbjerg, 2017).

Precarity

Our empirical data and analyses indicate that Norway depends on a precariat workforce in agriculture, both symbolically and in practice. Although the proportion of farms that hire migrant workers, both overall and in the fruit and vegetable sector, is in decline, Norway has food producers and productions that are dependent on this arrangement. After Norwegian agriculture rationalised almost all hired labour out of Norwegian agriculture (Bjørkhaug and Blekesaune, 2007; 2008), parts of the fruit and vegetable sector were re-proletarianised (Rye, et. al. 2018), leaving it with a precarious group of workers. We can argue that these are precarious in Kalleberg's (2018) sense of the term, that is, work that falls outside society's norms of what is accepted as fair. The fact that few Norwegians apply for these jobs is one indication of the substandard conditions in the sector and, even among the farmers, there is a steady decline in support for hiring migrant workers for less pay than Norwegians. Whilst precarity might not be the purpose of governmental arrangements, the public debate, statements, and lobbying from the main stakeholders in agriculture revealed a striking silence and lack of concern for the welfare of the individual migrant worker taking on extra risk during a global pandemic. Access to foreign labour was taken almost for granted. The major national concern, and the brunt of the criticism levied at the government, concerned its ability to implement policies that would secure food production and supply. Challenges pertaining to labour conditions were pushed downwards, for the farmers and their organisations to manage.

We also argue that the COVID-19 pandemic revealed a dependence on precarity workers in a more symbolic sense. The agricultural sector, in collaboration with the government, carved out arrangements for seasonal labour without consulting with the workers themselves. When migrant workers turned out to play a major role during COVID-19, they did so without having any real agency in the situation. They became 'invisible'

(Kalleberg, 2018). This represents a breach of what is normally described as 'The Norwegian Model', in which workers have a central and permanent place at the negotiating table in the labour regime (Nymoen, 2017). The focus of the narratives was on food security and self-sufficiency, with the danger of increased food prices and revenue loss for farmers experiencing a shortage of workers. One could argue that, since migrant workers are hired by individual farms and there is no national organisation representing them, the state and the agricultural organisations lack a partner to talk to. This, however, does not free the leading politicians and agricultural organisations from raising concerns over lower standards for migrant workers. Hence, if not an end goal, precarity is an effect of current policies.

Food security and self-sufficiency

When food security was addressed during the COVID-19 pandemic in Norway, it was the domestic needs for state preparedness and self-sufficiency that were at stake, not the single citizens' physical access to food. Therefore, Norwegian food security was never under threat, according to a standard definition of the concept: "when all people, at all times, have physical, social and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food that meets their dietary needs…" (FAO, 2023). Availability of food became key and was ensured by the government and food industry throughout the pandemic, through domestic production and trade agreements. COVID-19 was even seen as possibly having a positive impact on Norwegian food production because border closures deprived people of the possibility of cross-border shopping in Sweden, which generated added demand for domestic produce. Although there has long been an agreement over the main goals of agricultural policies across the political spectrum, we could see some political divisions emerging between the conservative government and the opposition parties in the political centre and to the left. The government presented a contingency policy for agriculture throughout the country 'in our natural productions' and argued that, with rural and small-scale measures, this could be maintained, and in combination with functioning international trade 'we see that we have done well' (Government, 2020e).

The opposition highlighted the vulnerability of agriculture and food supply that COVID-19 had revealed, linked to dependence on seasonal labour. The opposition further argued for increased efforts to strengthen food security and self-sufficiency, with an escalation plan to boost domestic production – particularly feed proteins, fruit and vegetables – and reduce import dependence. With this, the opposition presented an even greater emphasis on food sovereignty which would also mean continued dependence on migrant workers. By suggesting these various exceptional measures, both the government and the opposition contributed to increased politicisation of food security during the pandemic.

Clapp et al. (2022) raised questions about whether the existing understanding of food security was sufficient to embrace the sustainability of the food system, and the actors involved, not only as consumers. Our research confirms that food security is a powerful concept, but also confirms the weaknesses of using the concept solely to ensure national self-sufficiency. Recognising agency, empowerment, and the equality of all participants in the food system can result in profound changes. Including agricultural labour in an egalitarian social democratic model can also strengthen the achievement of the current goals of production and supply of food. In the situation we have looked at here, only the surface issues were addressed, whilst the financial challenges in agriculture have remained.

In their eagerness to ensure the legitimacy of the Norwegian agricultural model and the greatest possible degree of self-sufficiency, both the agricultural sector and national authorities ignored the genearl rules of the game in Norwegian society. The COVID-19 pandemic revealed that Norway finds itself in a situation where a group of workers has precarious working conditions, in contrast to the rights which Norwegian workers enjoy. When addressing migrant workers' rights, none of the regimes have taken responsibility for this or believe that it is their obligation. In the agricultural sector, it has been argued that the working conditions of all employees in Norway are the responsibility of all the parties in the labour regime, whilst the main actors in the labour regime believe that the welfare of farm workers is the responsibility of the farmers employing them. If this is not changed, there is little hope that the working conditions of migrant workers in Norway

will improve in the short run.

CONCLUSION

When the COVID-19 pandemic hit Norway, food security was high on the public agenda. Both the authorities and the food industry assured the population that there were no problems related to food supply; yet, at the same time, a narrative was developed that food security could be threatened by a lack of seasonal labour for agriculture. An impression was created that Norwegian agriculture was dependent on foreign seasonal labour. With hindsight, we know that Norwegian food security was never threatened and that consumers' access to food remained unchanged. However, the pandemic contributed to an intensification of the debate surrounding food security, preparedness issues, and vulnerabilities in the food system – but did not contribute to a renewed debate over agricultural exceptionalism or the welfare of migrant workers in agriculture.

In this article we considered how migrant workers came to be depicted in government discourses as sufficiently necessary to Norwegian food security to justify their exclusion from basic protections during the pandemic, contributing to their precarity as workers. We found that the 'dependency' narrative was not misleading in the sense that large parts of Norwegian fruit and vegetable production do depend on migrant workers and that, without this labour, self-sufficiency in those sectors would drop significantly. Actors in the agricultural sector, including the Minister for Food and Agriculture, O. Bollestad, recognised the added risk that migrant workers took on due to travelling during the pandemic, but argued that national food security was more important (Bollestad, 2020). Estimates based on public data, and data from the bi-annual farmer survey Trends (Zahl-Thanem and Melås, 2020; 2022), show that approximately 10,000-12,500 migrant workers were in Norway at the start of the pandemic. If these workers had not been available and not replaced by domestic labour, it would of course have affected the Norwegian self-sufficiency rate.

Since migrant workers were allowed entry relatively quickly, it is difficult to know whether the dependency narrative was misleading or not. One could argue that, since only 10% of Norwegian farms hired migrant workers at the start of the pandemic (down to 7% in 2023), a travel ban for this group as well should not have affected the food security of a western capitalist democracy with high purchasing power and established trade arrangements.

In this article, we have shown that the Norwegian government constructed a food security discourse to justify exceptional policy measures, such as unconventional financial measures to recruit Norwegian students and laid-off workers to agriculture, exemption from travel bans for migrant workers in agriculture, and a compensation scheme for farmers experiencing yield losses due to a shortage of labour during harvest. These arrangements prioritising production at the expense of workers' welfare were sought by representatives from the farming sector and the food industry. Of interest, and in line with Farsund and Daugbjerg (2017), is the way these dynamics are present and visible even in times without the pandemic.

This study has shown that migrant workers were visible as a resource but invisible as actors with agency during the pandemic; they did not participate in negotiations about risk and labour conditions. Our data show no evidence that leading politicians and agricultural industries were concerned about migrants having to take on extra risk by travelling across borders and being away from their families. Based on these findings, we argue that Norway has an established precariat of migrant seasonal workers, both symbolically and in practice, and has food producers (farmers) who depend on this arrangement. Migrant seasonal labour in agriculture was initially understood as essential for Norwegian food production and food security, and we have shown that this is, at best, a truth for the highly industrialised part of Norwegian fruit and vegetable production. Our research shows that there are powerful regime actors – the Farmers' Union, agricultural co-ops, the fruit and vegetable wholesalers, and the supermarket chains – that can strongly influence Norwegian agricultural policy and production. If they wanted to, these actors could also use their influence to improve working conditions for migrant workers in the Norwegian food system.

REFERENCES

Allison N, Ray K and Rohel J (2021) Mobilizing the streets: the role of food vendors in urban life. Food, Culture & Society 24(1): 2-15. DOI: 10.1080/15528014.2020.1860454.

Almås R (2016) Omstart. Forslag til ein ny landbrukspolitikk. Trondheim, Norway: Snøfugl.

Almås R (2004) Norwegian Agricultural History. Trondheim, Norway: Tapir Akademiske Forlag.

Arbeidstilsynet (2023) Pay and minimum rates of pay: Minimum wage. The Norwegian Labour Inspection Authority. Available at: https://www.arbeidstilsynet.no/en/working-conditions/pay-and-minimum-rates-of-pay/minimum-wage/ (accessed 24 February 2024).

Attorp A and McAreavey R (2020) Muck brass and smoke: policy post-exceptionalism in the agri-food sector. Journal of Rural Studies, 79: 302-310.

Berger PL and Luckmann T (1967) The social construction of reality: a treatise in the sociology of knowledge. London: Penguin.

Bjørkhaug H, Almås R and Brobakk J (2012) Emerging neo-productivist agriculture as an approach to food security and climate change in Norway. In: Almås R and Cambell H (eds) Rethinking Agricultural Policy Regimes: Food Security, Climate Change and the Future Resilience of Global Agriculture. Bingley: Emerald Insight, pp. 211-234.

Bjørkhaug H and Blekesaune A (2008) Gender and Work in Norwegian Family Farm Business. Sociologia Ruralis 48(2):152-165.

Bjørkhaug H and Blekesaune A (2007) Masculinisation or professionalisation of Norwegian farm work - a gender neutral division of work on Norwegian family farms? Journal of Comparative Family Studies XXXVIII(3): 423-434.

Blazy JM Causeret F and Guyader S (2021) Immediate impacts of COVID-19 crisis on agricultural and food systems in the Caribbean. Agricultural Systems 190. DOI: doi.org/10.1016/j.agsy.2021.103106.

Brekk,LP (2010) Agriculture and climate change – New concept proposal from policymakers and industry. Talk at the Global Forum for Food and Agriculture (GFFA), Berlin, and Berlin Summit of Agriculture Ministers, 16 January.

Brobakk J and Almås R (2011) Increasing food and energy prices in 2008: what where the causes and who was to blame? International Journal of Sociology of Agriculture and Food 18(3): 236-259.

Clapp J Moseley WG, Burlingame B and Termine P (2022) Viewpoint: The case for a six-dimensional food security framework. Food Policy 106. DOI: doi.org/10.1016/j.foodpol.2021.102164.

Clapp J and Moseley WG (2020) This food crisis is different: COVID-19 and the fragility of the neoliberal food security order. The Journal of Peasant Studies 47(7): 1393-1417.

Clapp J (2015) Food Self Sufficiency and International Trade: A False Dichotomy? The State of Agricultural Commodity Markets. Rome: FAO In Depths 2015-2016. DOI: 10.13140/RG.2.1.2447.2080.

Clarke AE, Friese C and Washburn R (2015) Situational Analysis in Practice: Mapping Research with Grounded Theory. Walnut Creek: Left Coast Press.

Clarke A (2003) Biomedicalization: Technoscientific Transformations of Health, Illness, and U.S. Biomedicine. American Sociological Review 68(2): 161-194.

Constance DH, Choi JY and Hendrickson MK (2023) The Southern Model Revisited: The Intersection of Race, Ethnicity, Immigration, and Health and Safety in Poultry Processing. Sustainability 15. DOI: https://doi.org/10.3390/su151813945.

Darnhofer I (2021) Resilience or how do we enable agricultural systems to ride the waves of unexpected change? Agricultural Systems 187. DOI: doi.org/10.1016/j.agsy.2020.102997

Daugbjerg C, Farsund AA and Langhelle O (2017) The resilience of paradigm mixes: food security in a post-exceptionalist trade regime. Journal of European Public Policy 24(11): 1698-1715.

Daugbjerg C and Feindt PH (2017) Post-exceptionalism in public policy: Transforming food and agricultural policy. Journal of European Public Policy 24(11): 1565–1584.

Daugbjerg C and Swinbank A (2009) Ideas, Institutions, & Trade. The WTO and the Curious Role of EU Farm Policy in Trade Liberalization. London: Oxford University Press.

Dixon JM, Weerahewa J et al. (2021) Response and resilience of Asian agrifood systems to COVID-19: An assessment across twenty-five countries and four regional farming and food systems. Agricultural Systems 193. DOI: doi.org/10.1016/j.agsy.2021.103168.

FAO (2023) The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2023. Urbanization, agrifood systems transformation and healthy diets across the rural–urban continuum. Rome: FAO, IFAD, UNICEF, WFP and WHO. DOI: https://doi.org/10.4060/cc3017en

Farsund AA and Daugbjerg C (2017) Debating Food Security Policy in Two Different Ideational Settings: A Comparison of Australia and Norway. Scandinavian Political Studies 40(4): 347-366.

Ferragina E, Arrigoni A and Spreckelsen TF (2022) The rising invisible majority. Bringing society back into international political economy. Review of International Political Economy 29(1): 114-151.

Grant WP (1995) The Limits of Common Agricultural Policy Reform and the Option of Denationalization. Journal of European Public Policy 2: 1-18.

Greer A (2017) Post exceptionalism politics in agriculture. An examination for the 2013 CAP reform. Journal of European Public policy 24(11): 1585-1603.

Gundersen GI and Myrli H (2021) Utenlandsk arbeidshjelp er viktig i hagebruksnæringen. Statistics Norway, 9 November. Available at: https://www.ssb.no/jord-skog-jakt-og-fiskeri/landbrukstellinger/statistikk/landbruksteljing/artikler/utenlandsk-arbeidshjelp-er-viktig-i-hagebruksnaeringen (accessed 25 November 2023).

Helfenstein J, Bürgi M et al. (2022) Farmer surveys in Europe suggest that specialized, intensive farms were more likely to perceive negative impacts from COVID-19. Agronomy for Sustainable Development 42. DOI: doi.org/10.1007/s13593-022-00820-5.

Hurdalsplattformen (2023) Hurdalsplattformen. For en regjering utgått fra Arbeiderpartiet og Senterpartiet (Hurdal Government Declaration). Available at https://www.regjeringen.no/contentassets/cb0adb6c6fee428caa81bd5b339501b0/no/pdfs/hurdalsplattformen.pdf (accessed 28 October 2023).

Kalleberg AL (2018) Precarious Lives. Cambridge: Cambridge Polity Press.

Kuns B, Börjeson L et al. (2023) From panic to business as usual: What coronavirus has revealed about migrant labour, agri-food systems and industrial relations in the Nordic countries. Sociologia Ruralis 63: 907–927.

Lopez-Ridaura S, Sanders A et al. (2021) Immediate impact of COVID-19 pandemic on farming systems in Central America and Mexico. Agricultural Systems 192. DOI: doi.org/10.1016/j.agsy.2021.103178.

McAreavey R (2017) New Immigration Destinations. Migrating to Rural and Peripheral Areas. London: Routledge.

McMichael P (2005) Global Development and the Corporate Food Regime. In: Buttel FH and McMichael P (eds) New Directions in the Sociology of Global Development, Research in Rural Sociology and Development (Volume 11). Bingley: Emerald Group Publishing Limited, pp. 265–300.

Moses J (2021) Workaway. The Human Costs of Europe's Common Labour Marked. Bristol: Bristol University Press.

Moyer HW and Josling TE (2002) Agricultural Policy Reform: Politics and Policy Process in the EC and the US in the 1990s. Aldershot: Ashgate.

Måren IE, Wiig H et al. (2022) Diversified Farming Systems: Impacts and Adaptive Responses to the COVID-19 Pandemic in the United States, Norway and China. Fronters in Sustainable Food Systems 6. DOI: 10.3389/fsufs.2022.887707.

Nymoen R (2017) Between Institutions and Global Forces: Norwegian Wage Formation Since Industrialisation. Econometrics 5(1). DOI: https://doi.org/10.3390/econometrics5010006

Rahimi P, Islam MS et al. (2022) Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on food production and animal health. Trends in Food Science & Technology 121:105-113.

Reid A, Ronda-Perez ER and Schenker MB (2021) Migrant workers, essential work, and COVID-19. American Journal of Industrial Medicine 64(2): 73-77.

Rodman SO, Barry CL et al. (2016) Agricultural Exceptionalism at the State Level: Characterization of Wage and Hour Laws for U.S. Farmworkers. Journal of Agriculture, Food Systems, and Community development 6(2): 89-110.

Rye JF and Andrzejewska J (2010) The structural disempowerment of Eastern European migrant farm workers in Norwegian Agriculture. Journal of Rural Studies 26(1): 41–51.

Rye JF and Scott S (2018), International Labour Migration and Food Production in Rural Europe: A Review of the Evidence. Sociologia Ruralis 58: 928-952.

Rye JF and Slettebak MH (2020) The new geography of labour migration: EU11 migrants in rural Norway. Journal of Rural Studies 75: 125-131.

Rye JF, Slettebak MH and Bjørkhaug H (2018) From family to domestic and global labour? A decade of proletarisation of labour in the Norwegian horticulture industry. European Countryside 10(4): 528–42.

Scott S and Rye JF (2021) International Labour Migration and Food Production in Rural Europe: A Review of the Evidence. Sociologia Ruralis 58(4): 928-952.

Skogstad G (1998) Ideas, paradigms and institutions: Agricultural exceptionalism in the European Union and the United States. Governance 11(4): 463-490.

Stachowski J and Fialkowska K (2020) 'Living on the edge'? A comparative study of processes of marginalisation among Polish migrants in rural Germany and Norway. In: Rye JF and O'Reilly K (eds) International Labour Migration to Europe's Rural Regions. London: Routledge, pp. 104-121.

Stephens EC, Martin G, Van Wijk M, Timsina J and Snow W (2020) Impacts of COVID-19 on agricultural and food systems worldwide and on progress to the sustainable development goals. Agricultural Systems 183. DOI: doi.org/10.1016/j.agsy.2020.102873.

Sæther I and Stachowski J (2023) Mind the recognition gaps: layers of invisibility of farm migration in Norway. Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies. DOI: doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2023.2252991.

Wolf S and Bonanno A (eds) (2016) The Neoliberal Regime in the Agri-Food Sector. Crisis, Resilience, and Restructuring. London: Routledge.

UNSDG (2023) United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. Available at https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/ (accessed 24 February 2024)

Woods M (2018) Precarious rural cosmopolitanism: Negotiating globalization, migration and diversity in Irish small towns. Journal of Rural Studies 64: 164-176.

Woods M (2017) Contesting Rurality. Politics in the British Countryside. London: Routledge.

Zahl-Thanem A and Melås A (2022) Trender i norsk landbruk 2022. En nasjonal spørreundersøkelse blant bønder i Norge (Trends in Norwegian agriculture). Ruralis report 10/2022. Trondheim: Ruralis.

Zahl-Thanem A and Melås A (2020) Trender i norsk landbruk 2020 (Trends in Norwegian agriculture). Ruralis report

2/2020. Trondheim, Ruralis.

Media outtakes

Bama (2020) Nasjonal dugnad for å sikre norsk matforsyning. Available at https://www.bama.no/aktuelt/arkiv/2020/nasjonal-dugnad-for-a-sikre-norsk-matforsyning/ (accessed 30 October 2023).

Bollestad O (2020) Feilslåtte påstander fra Havro. Nationen , 6 April.

Bondebladet (2020) Nordmenn vil ikke gjøre denne jobben. Bondebladet, 30 September.

Farmers Union (2020a) Rettigheter i forbindelse med koronautbruddet. Available at https://www.bondelaget.no/tema/koronaviruset/rettigheter-i-forbindelse-med-koronautbruddet (accessed 30 October 2023).

Farmers Union (2020b) Utenlandske arbeidstakere og koronaviruset. Available at https://www.bondelaget.no/ tema/koronaviruset/utenlandske-arbeidstakere-og-koronaviruset (accessed 30 October 2023).

Farmers Union (2020c) Vil innføre «frikort» for permitterte. Available at https://www.bondelaget.no/tema/koronaviruset/vil-innfore-frikort-for-permitterte (accessed 28 October 2023).

Fafo Østforum (2020) Matforsyningen til Norge har hittil fungert godt og markedene har vært åpne. Available at https://fafooestforum.no/nyheter/matforsyningen-til-norge-har-hittil-fungert-godt-og-markedene-har-vaert-apne (accessed 28 October 2023).

Government (2020a) Innreisemuligheter for EØS-borgere. Government Historical Archives, 30 March. Oslo: The Ministry of Agriculture and Food.

Government (2020b) Nok mat til alle. Government Historical Archives, 12 March. Oslo: The Ministry of Trade, Industry and Fisheries.

Government (2020c) Matproduksjonen går som normalt. Government Historical Archives, 13 March. Oslo: The Ministry of Agriculture and Food.

Government (2020d) Statement on CovidCOVID-19 and the multilateral trading system by ministers responsible for the WTO. Available at https://www.regjeringen.no/globalassets/departementene/ud/vedlegg/handelspolitikk/minister_covid19.pdf (accessed 30 October 2023).

Government (2020e) Revisions to the State Budget of Norway 2020 (Proposition 142 S (2019–2020). Available at https://www.regjeringen.no/no/dokumenter/prop.-142-s-20192020/id2765239/?q=jordbruk&ch=2# (accessed 28 October 2023).

Government (2020f) Residence permit extension for foreign workers. Government Historical Archives, 22 March. Oslo: The Ministry of Agriculture and Food.

Government (2020g) More EEA nationals may enter Norway. Government Historical Archives, 9 April. Oslo: The Ministry of Justice and Public Security.

Government (2020h) Mer gunstig å kombinere dagpenger og sesongarbeid i landbruket. Government Historical Archives, 20 April. Oslo: The Ministry of Agriculture and Food.

Government (2021a) Stortingets spørretime. Sandtrøen to Bollestad. Document no. 15:1207 (2021).

Government (2021b) Stortingets spørretime. Pollestad to Bollestad. Document no. 15:1608 (2021).

Government (2021c) Major changes to country assessments – more countries are being categorised as green. Ministry of Health and Care Services, Ministry of Justice and Public Security, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 5 July. Available at https://www.regjeringen.no/en/historical-archive/solbergs-government/Ministries/hod/News/2021ny/major-changes-to-country-assessments-more-countries-are-being-categorised-as-green/id2865113/ (accessed 28 October 2023).

Government (2021d) Dokumentasjonsordning for grøntnæringen ved behov for utenlandsk arbeidskraft. Government Historical Archives, 19 March. Oslo: The Ministry of Agriculture and Food.

Government (2021e) Sesongarbeidere kan bli i Norge ut året. Government Historical Archives, 24 September. Oslo: The Ministry of Agriculture and Food.

Hatlevik S E (2020) Dugnadsretorikken ødelegger muligheter for bedre lønninger i jordbruket. PLAN, 26 May.

NAA (2023) Norsk jordbruk mot 2030 (Norwegian Agriculture Towards 2030). Norwegian Agricultural Agency. Available at https://www.landbruksdirektoratet.no/nb/nyhetsrom/nyhetsarkiv/norsk-jordbruk-mot-2030 (accessed 28 October 2023).

NRK (2020a) Koronaen har bråstoppet økonomien. Debatten. Oslo: Norwegian Broadcasting Corporation (NRK), 19 March. Available at https://tv.nrk.no/serie/debatten/202003/NNFA51031920/avspiller (accessed 30 October 2023).

NRK (2020b) Koronakonsekvenser for jordbruket, kommunene og skolene økonomien. Debatten, 7 April. Oslo: Norwegian Broadcasting Corporation (NRK). Available at https://tv.nrk.no/serie/debatten/202004/NNFA51040220/avspiller (accessed 29 October 2023).

TV2 (2020) Vil lette på grensekontrollen for utenlandske sesongarbeidere. TV2. News interview with the Minister for Justice and Public Security, Monica Mæland, 30 March. Oslo: TV2.

Vermes, T. (2020) Arbeidskraftkrise i jordbruket: – LO og NHO må forhandle opp tarifflønna i jordbruket til norsk nivå! Available at: https://www.abcnyheter.no/nyheter/politikk/2020/03/30/195664605/lo-og-nho-ma-forhandle-opp-tarifflonna-i-jordbruket-til-norsk-niva (accessed 29 October 2023).

The State of Indigenous Foods[1] in Africa: The case of Mankon Community in the Northwest Region of Cameroon

Paper first received: 23 October 2023; Accepted: 19 April 2024; Published in final form: 18 August 2024
https://doi.org/10.48416/ijsaf.v30i1.554

Sheila NGOH MANKA[1] and Mokong Simon MAPADIMENG[2]

Abstract

Food is an indispensable item for all human beings, and a means of survival. Through food, people create their own identities, which influence how they view themselves in relation to others. Food carries meanings that are associated with various occasions. Food also fosters communication among people and provides access to coded messages as well as forms of interaction that are not obvious to the external observer. There is however a paucity of qualitative studies on food and its symbolic and communicative function, especially on indigenous foods in the formerly colonised communities. This is even more glaringly so in Africa, despite the continent's long precolonial history of dependence on indigenous foods. It is for this reason, and especially in view of the recent experiences with the covid-19 pandemic and its aggravation of food insecurity, that this article examines the state of indigenous foods in Africa through the case of the Mankon community in the Northwest region of Cameroon. A qualitative research approach was adopted, using in-depth interviews to collect data from 25 participants within the Mankon community. The findings revealed that the Mankon people continue to hold indigenous foods in high regard, not only for their nutritious and medicinal or health value but also for their socio-cultural significance. A lack of knowledge of the socio-cultural significance of these foods however became evident amongst the youth, calling for promotional educational interventions. Notwithstanding the limitations of this study, it contributes to closing the gap of a lack in qualitative research on indigenous foods, especially in Africa.

[1] University of Mpumalanga, South Africa
[2] University of South Africa, South Africa

Corresponding author: Mokong Simon Mapadimeng, emapadms@unisa.ac.za

Biographical notes

Dr MANKA N Sheila was a senior lecturer at the University of Mpumalanga in South Africa. Her research interests include education, gender, health, food, social policies and particular interest in food consumption patterns in Africa. She is a past, and current member of the International Sociological Association affiliated to the working group (RC 40 Sociology of Agriculture and Food).

Dr MAPADIMENG S Mokong is currently Professor of Sociology at the University of South Africa and was previously Professor of Sociology at the universities of Limpopo and North-West. He is the past president of the South African Sociological Association and a recent past member of the Executive Committee of the International Sociological Association. His latest publication is an edited book volume titled Indigenous knowledge systems in the 21st century: Recognising and harnessing their worth (Juta & Co. Ltd, 2022).

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The authors and editors want to recognize the work of Sheila Manka, who passed suddenly after a short illness in 2024. She participated in the Liepzig Conference and was very active in the RC40 community. Dr. Mapadimeng took on the responsibility to finalize the revision of their joint paper, which has been published posthumously.

[1] In this article, the term 'indigenous foods' will mostly be used by the authors, although in a few instances, and consistent with the literature reviewed on the same subject, it will be used interchangeably with the term 'traditional foods'.

Introduction

The fact that people eat food to satisfy their daily needs tends to create ignorance, as food is simply viewed as a means to meet those daily needs without any further significance. This view is echoed in the definitions of food such as those offered by Brian and Allan (1995:2-3), according to whom food is 'any substance absorbed by the body, and which produces energy and promotes the growth and repair of tissues to regulate these processes'. Dorland (2003) concurs with Brian and Allan in defining food as 'anything which, when taken into the body, serves to nourish or build up the tissues or supply body heat'. These definitions are however restrictive. When one begins to ask questions concerning, for example, the ingredients needed for the preparation of this kind of food, or the reasons for it being prepared and eaten in a particular way and called by a particular name, the answers begin to transcend the bounds of culinary studies and the view of food simply as a necessity to meet our daily bodily needs. They tell us so much about the social and cultural significance of food. Our cultures, rituals, traditions, and practices can moreover best be understood through food and the way it is handled and consumed. As Sidiq et al. (2022:1) have argued, 'traditional foods meet cultural needs in preserving traditional cuisine and ways of life and maintain local communities' cultural heritage'. This understanding of food justifies Barthes (1979)'s sociological definition of foods which transcends the above, and in terms of which food is considered as a system of communication, a constellation of images, and a protocol of usages and behaviours. Thus, people use food to communicate with one another, to establish rules of behaviour (protocols) and to affirm as much as to negotiate their identity. Food can indeed be used to exchange intricate messages; it is a powerful assemblage as it speaks in relation to particular social events. Our view, which is consistent with that of Sidiq et al. (2022), is therefore that the socio-cultural significance of food is even more pronounced in indigenous foods.

As a point of departure, we find it imperative to clarify what we mean by indigenous foods as used in this article, in contrast to modern Western processed foods. Our starting point on this is the rather instructive definition of indigenous people provided by the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNPFII) (2000). The Forum thus defines indigenous people as:

> *those that have historically belonged to a particular region or country, before its colonization or transformation into a nation state, and may have different – often unique – cultural, linguistic, traditional, and other characteristics to those of the dominant culture of that region or state.*

Proceeding from this definition, indigenous foods can equally be understood as those foods that were produced and consumed by people who lived in a particular region or country before the onset of colonisation and are therefore unique to that place and its cultural traditions. This understanding is in line with those articulated by other scholars who assert that indigenous food is any food commonly consumed and associated with specific celebrations and whose preparation protocols are passed from one generation to another. Cayot (2007), for instance, posits that indigenous foods are unique in their recipe, ingredients and mode of preparation as defined by a particular group of people for a very long time.

Indigenous foods are also referred to as traditional foods, that Kouebou et al. (2013:486) describe as food that is:

> *frequently consumed or associated with specific seasons, usually passed on from one generation to another, carefully prepared in a specific way according to the gastronomic heritage, with little or no processing/ manipulation, that is distinguished and known because of its sensory properties and associated to a certain local area, region or country.*

Raschke et al.'s (2007) review study found several empirical investigations that associate traditional food items with health benefits. These foods include, amongst others, millet, green leafy vegetables, roots and tubers, fruits, legumes, palm oil, wild 'bush' meat, and maize (Raschke et al., 2007: 10).

It is worth stressing that indigenous foods or traditional foods are distinct from modern processed foods

that originated largely with western European industrialisation and spread throughout the world through historical processes of colonial conquest. This spread was in recent decades intensified by the globalisation of the western capitalist economic system that is said to have negatively impacted indigenous food systems. In North America, for instance, colonial intrusion and its imposition of western food systems resulted in what was recorded as a disconnection of indigenous peoples from their traditional food systems. This is attributed to factors associated with colonialism, climate change, capitalism, legal change, and socio-cultural change (Malli et al., 2023). Namrata (2014) likewise argues that westernisation has seriously undermined indigenous cultural practices as it has interfered with traditions, which in turn has led to the abandonment of some cultural practices, including indigenous food consumption habits.

As we well know, globalisation processes, through which western cultural practices – including food consumption habits – spread, have not always proceeded smoothly and unchallenged. They have been countered by localisation forces that impose constraints on them, thus preventing total elimination of local cultural practices. In some cases, local practices have merged with non-local ones, creating hybrid forms. This also applies to foods and consumption patterns, as evidenced in the systematic literature review by Malli et al. (2023:5) on the impact of European colonisation on indigenous communities of North America. Their review found that as the indigenous food systems in these communities underwent significant changes, some of the indigenous peoples moved towards non-traditional, store-bought diets, while others continued to rely on traditional food systems, and yet others on a combination of the two (i.e., traditional and non-traditional).
Against this backdrop, this article explores the following key questions, among others: What are indigenous foods in the Mankon community of Cameroon? Do the people of Mankon have a sound knowledge of indigenous foods and their value? Have there been any changes in the consumption patterns of indigenous foods? What impact, if any, has the introduction of the western colonial and industrial economic system had on indigenous foods and their consumption? Closely related to these questions is that of food security, especially against the background of the recent covid-19 outbreak and the attendant national government's lockdowns. What implications can covid-19 have for indigenous food systems and their role in food security? This article starts off with a discussion of the method used for data collection and analysis, followed by the presentation of findings and their analysis, and the examination of lessons learned from the recent experiences with the covid-19 pandemic and its implications for indigenous foods. This then leads to some concluding remarks.

Methodology

This study was carried out in Mankon Community in the Northwest of Cameroon over a four-month period from February 2017 to May 2017. At the time of this field research, the Makon population stood at 180,000 residents. The study was part of a doctoral degree thesis at the Northwest University in South Africa[1]. Prior to conducting the field study, the research proposal was submitted to the Northwest University Ethics Committee for ethical approval. The ethical clearance was granted in October 2016. The main researcher, Dr Sheila Manka, who is the co-author of this article, was a citizen of Cameroon and a member of the Mankon community. She moved to South Africa to pursue further studies and was therefore based in South Africa when this research was conducted. Once ethical clearance was granted, she travelled back to Cameroon during the December 2016 year-end holidays to prepare and undertake field research. On 10 February 2017, she visited the Royal House of the Mankon community to make a formal request for access to do the study. The researcher was directed to the receptionist at the Royal House where she submitted the ethical clearance letter and a letter requesting permission to conduct the study in the community for the attention of the Royal Council. On 16 February 2017, she was called back to the Royal House where the receptionist presented her with the Royal Council's approval letter, granting permission to do the study in the community. On the same day, she met with a senior member of the Royal Council known as Nchinda, who provided her

[1] Manka, Sheila Ngoh (2022) Food and consumption patterns of selected communities in South Africa and Cameroon. North-West University (South Africa). Available at https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5007-9816; http://hdl.handle.net/10394/38857

with a list of possible and relevant participants, in line with the criteria stipulated in the letter submitted to request permission to do the study. The list proved very helpful in tracing and accessing the participants.

The research methodology used was qualitative. A non-probability sampling technique was used in the form of a purposeful sampling technique to select participants, as guided by the list received from the Royal Council. In doing so, care was taken to include only relevant individuals, thus ensuring a breakdown of the participants into appropriate age categories, and the selection of participants who were indeed keen to share their views and their experiences with indigenous foods. A total of 25 participants were selected for in-depth interviews. The sample was arranged into three different age categories: young (aged between 20 and 35); adult (aged between 36 and 50); and elderly (aged 51 and above). The collection of data was done using an interview guide. Participants were interviewed on the following key issues: 1) their knowledge of the indigenous foods of their community; 2) changes in food consumption patterns; 3) their staple food preferences; and 4) their understanding of the social and cultural meanings and significance of indigenous foods. Over and above the recorded replies, some participants were kind enough to allow the researcher to take pictures of the foods, as evidenced by the photographs included in this article. Pictures of foods served at funerals and weddings were taken during these events when the researcher was still in Cameroon. The duration of the interviews ranged from forty-five (45) to ninety (90) minutes.

A tape recorder was used, with the permission of the participants, to record the interviews for later transcription and analysis. The analysis was done thematically, whereby sub-themes were grouped in line with the study's objectives and were reported on narratively. The results were interpreted and analysed using the secondary evidence from the literature review, the theoretical frameworks, and the participants' empirical responses.

Figure 1 below shows the distribution of participants according to sex, where the majority of participants, 56% of the sample, are males, with females making up 44% of the sample.

Figure 1: Sex Distribution

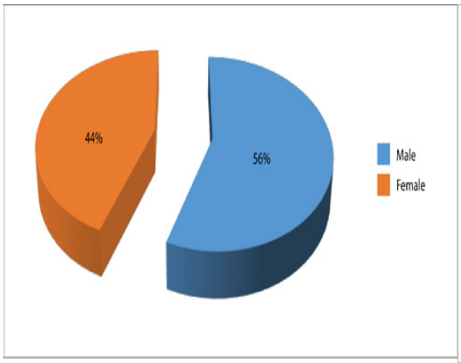


Figure 2: Level of education

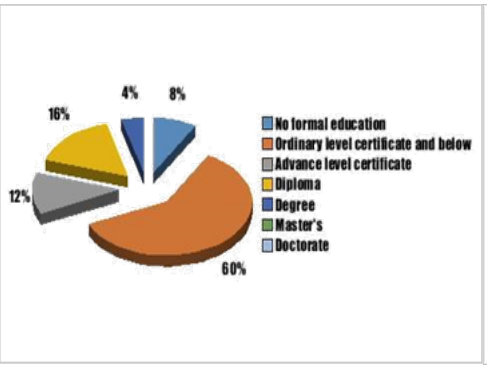


Figure 3: Level of income

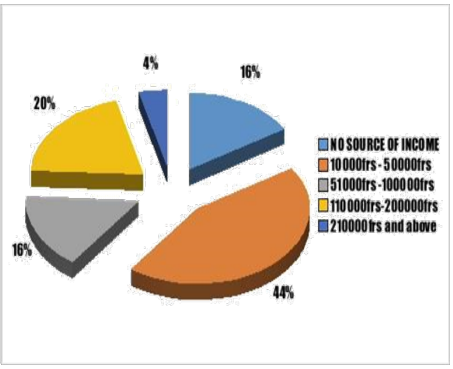


Figure 2 above presents the level of education of participants from the Mankon community. The figure shows that sixty percent (60%) of participants had obtained a General Certificate of Education (Ordinary Level certificate), sixteen percent (16%) had a diploma certificate, twelve percent (12%) had a GCE Advanced Level certificate, eight percent (8%) of participants had no formal education, while four percent (4%) had a university degree.

Figure 3 above shows different income levels of participants within the Mankon Community. Sixteen percent (16%) of participants had no source of income, while forty-four percent (44%) earned between FCFA 10,000 and FCFA 50,000, and sixteen percent (16%) earned between FCFA 51,000 and FCFA100,000. Twenty percent (20%) and four percent (4%) earned incomes of between FCFA 110,000 and FAFA 200,000, and FCFA 210,000, respectively.

Discussion and analysis of findings

The discussion of findings below focuses on various sub-themes as derived from participants' responses to various questions explored during the interviews. Three major subthemes emerged on participants' knowledge of indigenous foods, their understanding of the socio-cultural significance of these foods, and their food preferences.

Participants' knowledge of indigenous foods in the community

One of the questions explored was meant to establish participants' knowledge of indigenous foods. In their responses, the foods listed in Table 1 below were mentioned, as well as how they were prepared and consumed. As the table shows, these foods fall into two main categories: foods that are derived from vegetables/herbs/crops, and those that are meat-based.

Table 1: Indigenous Food Dishes in the Mankon Community

Food type	Food name
Vegetables/herbs/crops-based dishes	Achu with yellow or black soup (*ambarga*)
	Akaka madus (a mixture of fried groundnut/peanut and corn)
	Akwa (pounded macabo cocoyams or cassava) with soup (okra, *egusi* soup or vegetable soup)
	Boiled cassava and vegetables
	Cassava *koki* (like *koki* beans)
	Cassava grind with some salt and palm oil added and tied in plantain leaves.
	Fufu corn and vegetables.
	Nkon (small cocoyam porridge with some cocoyam leaves).
	Yams (different varieties such as hairy, yellow and sweet) eaten with vegetables, soup or plain without any relish.
	Roasted plantain and fried groundnuts eaten without any relish.
	Corn chaff without beans (corn porridge).
	Yellow yam roasted and eaten plain (without any relish) accompanied by a cup of *raffia* wine (traditionally brewed drink).
	Nzea Anery (garden eggs soup)
	Cocoyams, cassava or yams.
	Adong (similar to sweet potatoes, boiled and eaten with vegetables or soup)
	Boiled plantain eaten with vegetables or soup (*egusi*, bitter leaf soup etc).
	Cocoyam porridge with palm oil and vegetables.
Meat based dishes	Cooked egusi (prepared and wrapped in small bundles and dried, called 'nuttie' used as Maggi or beef cubes in the past).
	Plantain porridge with a lot of palm oil and cow meat.

This list suggests that indigenous foods are still known to the Mankon people and continue to be visible and available to this community. A question of interest though, beyond this, is whether the people of Mankon community command a good knowledge and understanding of what these foods mean, that is, their socio-cultural significance and value to health. What does the literature say about the state of these foods and their significance in the modern-day world? Is there a disjuncture and/or connection between the views of the participants in Mankon community about the significance of indigenous foods, and those articulated in the published literature? What implications does this have for indigenous foods and their role, both today and in the future of indigenous communities such as the Mankon? This section attempts to answer these questions based on the responses received from the Mankon people who participated in this study, and the evidence from existing published literature.

Meanings and significance of indigenous foods for the Mankon community

During the field research, participants were asked a question designed to establish their knowledge and understanding of indigenous foods and the socio-cultural significance and meanings of those foods. This is a crucial question within the discourse of food and consumption studies. As Mary Douglas (1984) pointed out, food is a code through which messages are conveyed about social events, social identity and social relationships. Similarly, Roland Barthes (1979) argued that an item of food constitutes an item of information with cultural significance to those from the same cultural background. This, he argues, is especially so with respect to types of food prepared for specific social and cultural events.

This study's findings support these theoretical views as the Mankon community too has specific types of foods which are prepared differently on and for different social events. Such events maybe funerals, births, weddings, and naming ceremonies of children, where food prepared and served has to be in line with the mood and the cultural significance of the event.

Image 1. Mixed boiled corn and peanuts/groundnuts as a symbol of pain and grief

Participants stated that groundnuts/peanuts mixed with corn (as depicted in Image 1 above) symbolise pain, grief and mourning the loss of a loved one. It is therefore commonly prepared and served during funerals for the mourners. That this is indeed so, was revealed in participants' responses.

An elderly female participant with no formal education, and employed, gave the following response:

> *Boiled corn and groundnuts are found only at funerals. You cannot cook it in your house. It was believed that if you cook it in your house, you were inviting the spirit of death to your house. You will not find a funeral without boiled corn and groundnuts. Boiled corn and groundnuts are always present during funerals, and it was used as an appetizer to spice up the food.*

Similarly, a middle-aged male participant with a primary school education, and employed, explained:

> *It is rare to attend a funeral and not find boiled corn and groundnuts. You cannot go to the funeral and not find boiled corn and groundnut. It symbolises mourning.*

A middle-aged female participant with an ordinary level of education, and employed, also said:

> *The presence of boiled corn and groundnut at a funeral is tradition and culture. It also signifies mourning and grieving. It is not common to see people prepare and eat it in their homes.*

Another food type prepared and served at funerals in the Mankon community is ngonedic, which is a porridge consisting of long plantains cooked with palm oil and meat. It is served to all the mourners on warm plantain leaves outside of the house as it symbolises grief. When this meal is served, men and women are not allowed to sit and eat together, in line with traditional customs that emphasise respect, especially for men of titles. This is evidenced in the responses of elderly female and male participants, cited below:

> *If a woman passes beside a male titleholder and she happens to be on her menstrual period, it is believed that the woman might bleed for a longer period than expected. To avoid such complications, which might arise if both sexes have to sit together, it is considered safe to separate them.*

We have the outside porridge plantain, which is served on leaves. It is called chop for outside or chop for Sangabing. This food is prepared outside and consumed outside. The food is only consumed after the burial and symbolises that the funeral is over.

For occasions of joy and happiness such as weddings and family reunions, the Mankon people prepare and consume red cola nuts (see Image 2 below) which symbolise hospitality, peace, and joy. As the adage goes, 'He that brings cola nuts, brings peace'. The sharing and eating of cola nuts between families symbolises unity and mutual peaceful existence. Cola nuts are usually served with traditional beer known as raffia wine (see Images 3 and 4 below).

Image 2: Red cola nuts.

Image 3: Raffia wine in modern glass.

Image 4: Raffia wine (traditional beer) in a traditional cup.

Raffia wine is derived from the raffia tree. This alcoholic drink is usually consumed during or before meals. It is often served at traditional wedding ceremonies for handing over the woman to the man as a sign of unity between the two families. During such ceremonies, a bride is required to identify her husband by first taking a sip and then leaving the rest for her husband as a symbol of their bond.

This is attested by the following response by a middle-aged male participant with a primary school education, married with four children:

> *Raffia wine is very important in every traditional marriage as it is used to hand the bride over to the groom's family and to indicate that the bride has officially been given out for marriage.*

Another food that is served at traditional weddings is acape mengue. This is a boiled plantain cooked separately, and a relish prepared with cocoyam leaves accompanied with a lot of palm oil and big pieces of meat. Excessive palm oil in the food gets drained into a container and stored for almost a week for re-use. Palm oil in the Mankon community dishes symbolises joy and happiness, and when served during weddings, it also symbolises unity and a bond between the families of the bride and the groom. Acape mengue is given to the bride's aunts while the bride's uncles are given money and whisky. This is captured in the response below by an elderly female participant with no formal education, married with five children and employed:

> *A special indigenous dish is prepared by the groom's family and taken to the bride's family. The food is prepared with a lot of palm oil and red meat, with long plantains uncut. It is symbolic as it is the first sign expressing the groom's intention of marriage to the bride's family.*

A middle-aged male participant with a class-five educational level, who was employed, said:

> *Acape mengue is eaten during the celebration of a traditional wedding. Plantain is boiled separately and the ambarga soup is cooked separately with a lot of meat. Its presence symbolises joy and happiness.*

Achu with yellow or black soup (as depicted in Image 5 below) is another socially and culturally symbolic food of the Mankon people. Achu consists of pounded Ibo cocoyams with yellow soup (palm oil, limestone, meat, cow skin and some spices) or black soup (dry or fresh cocoyam leaf grind, some spices, crayfish, smoked fish and meat).

Image 5: Achu with yellow or black soup consumed on leaves (in the past).

It is prepared and served at all cultural and social events in the Mankon community. Its symbolic significance is captured in responses such as those cited below.

A young male participant with a bachelor's degree, employed, said:

> *Achu can be eaten with either black or yellow soup and it gives a cultural identity to the Mankon people. It is the main traditional dish of the people and is found in most social and cultural events.*

An elderly male participant with a primary school education, married and employed, said:

> *The presence of Achu signifies the tradition of the Mankon people in any social or cultural gathering. They usually say the mother's food is the best for the baby, so, whatever food a person eats during an event within the Mankon community, can never be as significant as the consumption of Achu.*

According to these responses, the Achu meal represents the cultural identity of the Mankon community. It is considered as a dignifying meal. Its consumption with yellow or black soup serves to distinguish the real indigenous members of the Mankon community from strangers. In the past, it was consumed on leaves, as seen in Image 5 above, but today it is served on a plate (see image 6 below).

Image 6: Achu with yellow or black soup consumed on a plate (in modern society).

The responses from participants in the Mankon community support the assertion by Amy (2008) that food represents affiliation with a culture. Participants' responses are also consistent with Kniazeva (2003)'s view that foods are cultural expressions through which people establish, maintain and reinforce national ethnic and individual identities.

Egusi pudding (depicted by Image 7 below) is another example of indigenous foods in the Mankon community. Egusi are pumpkin seeds which are dried and peeled. These seeds are later ground and prepared as egusi pudding or egusi soup. Egusi pudding is served with Calabar yam, boiled plantains, bobolo or miyondo (made of cassava), boiled ripe plantains, or even with cassava or cocoyam. It symbolises respect and honour and is therefore referred to as 'dignity food'. It conveys honour and respect on anyone served with this food. It is often presented to people who are regarded as very important in the community, or to the elderly, and is seldom prepared in households.

In the words of this middle-aged male participant with higher education(i.e. post-secondary school education), and employed:

> *Egusi pudding is food which carries meaning of respect and honour. It is usually given to the elderly and not the youths.*

An elderly male participant with an advanced educational level (in Cameroon, this level of educational attainment ranges in terms of grades A, B, C, D, E to F where F is a fail while all other grades a pass) , and employed said:

> *Egusi pudding is also cooked and given to the girl's family as a sign of respect by the in-laws.*

Similarly, an elderly female participant with an advanced level of education, and employed, explained:

> *When a person is given egusi pudding it sends a message of respect and honour.This is because it is not usually prepared on ordinary days and consumed by all. It is often given to the elderly and consumed by them.*

> *Despite differences in income-level, all the middle-aged and elderly participants attested that serving the indigenous food egusi pudding conveys honour and respect.*

It is only prepared when there is an important event such as a wedding, and on important public holidays such as Easter Sunday, Christmas day, and New Year's day. It is also sometimes prepared for an important visitor. Egusi pudding is mostly consumed in small portions.When served, it is given to adults to share with the youth. It is not a daily staple food.

Image 7: Egusi in its uncooked and prepared forms (Egusi pudding)

The Mankon people have a customary event called 'born house' (a term used to describe a welcoming ceremony of a newborn baby or a new mother into the family by mainly elderly women). During the 'born house', members prepare an indigenous roast plantain mashed in palm oil and seasoned with salt. Palm oil in the Mankon tradition is highly symbolic as palm is considered a tree of peace and providence. This explains why in every cultural event, food is usually prepared with palm oil. This is shared with all those present at the 'born house'. The meal signifies a newborn baby's house, and one should eat the meal as a sign of welcoming the baby.

This is explained in the response from an elderly male participant with a school-leaving certificate and employed:

> *Roast plantain mashed with some palm oil and a pinch of salt is one of the foods which is significant during born houses. Roasted plantain with oil while adding a pinch of salt. Simple like that, it's very nice.*

In addition, an elderly female participant with no formal level of education and employed also explained:

> *During the celebration of the birth of a newborn baby, plantain is usually roasted and pounded while adding some salt and palm oil. It is eaten by the guest. It is symbolic as it carries a message of joy and happiness and the event is the celebration of a newborn baby in the household.*

Furthermore, another middle-aged male participant with a class five educational level and employed stated that:

> *During the celebration ceremony of the birth of a newborn baby, a special meal is prepared which is pounded roast plantain with a pinch of salt and palm oil. Everyone is given the food as a sign that they have been to the house of a newborn baby, which symbolises joy and happiness.*

In line with the above responses, an elderly female participant, who has a diploma and is employed, also explained:

> *We also have the roasted plantain with palm oil and salt. It is always present during the celebration ceremony of the birth of a newborn baby in the house. This food speaks for itself, symbolising the presence of a newborn baby in the house. It carries a message of joy.*

A striking feature of the responses on the social and cultural meanings and significance of indigenous foods within the Mankon community, which reveal a good knowledge and understanding of these foods, is that they were mostly given by the elderly and middle-aged participants. There was limited input from the young

participants. While some youth recognise that these foods are commonly served at cultural and social events, they do not display a thorough understanding of their underlying social and cultural meanings. The youth's limited knowledge of indigenous foods could be revealing of the phenomenon known in food studies as 'nutrition transition'. This refers to dietary changes marked by a shift away from consumption of traditional diets towards more consumption of westernised diets. This shift has been identified in earlier studies. For instance, a systematic review of the literature published between 2000 and 2020, found that notwithstanding the evident awareness on the part of indigenous peoples about the importance of traditional food resources, the consumption of indigenous foods was in reality low (Sidig et al., 2022). This is supported by the research done by Raschke et al. (2007:10) whose survey found that the 'majority of the interviewees (78%) believed that knowledge of traditional African food habits was being lost'. This was seen as signalling an urgent need for interventions to promote indigenous peoples' awareness of these foods, as well as to safeguard and maintain traditional food-based knowledge. This, it is argued, could be achieved through targeted education of youth about the importance of traditional food systems (Sidig et al., 2022). This finding supports Kuhnlein and Receveur (1996: 434)'s argument that '… factors that cause decreased use of traditional food systems will lead to declining transfer of traditional knowledge to young people on how to recognize, harvest, process, and prepare their food.'

Participants' food preference - indigenous or modern western processed foods?

In seeking to understand the status of indigenous foods (i.e. whether or not these foods continue to consumed and appreciated, or have been abandoned), it was necessary to find out from participants what their preferences were for staple foods, between indigenous foods and modern western processed foods. The question on food preferences elicited the following responses.

An employed male youth participant with a secondary school education responded as follows:

> *We still consume the indigenous food because modern food comes with health-related diseases. Thus, it later affects our hormones and causes us to grow obese and look older than our age.*

An employed, elderly male participant with a diploma said:

> *I still consume indigenous food because it is fresh and very nutritious. These modern foods are not usually fresh and easily lose their nutrients.*

An employed, middle-aged male participant with an advanced level of education responded as follows:

> *I still consume indigenous food because it contains all the nutrients my body needs for its proper functioning.*

Another middle-aged male participant with the same characteristics as above declared:

> *We still consume indigenous food because I grew up eating it, and more so because it is naturally grown and does not lead to health-related diseases.*

An unemployed middle-aged female participant with a diploma, responded as follows:

> *I consume indigenous food more because it is natural. It will not cause any diseases. I live on it, otherwise you would not have seen me here today, strong enough. I can stay for a month without eating rice. I will eat roasted plantain/cocoyam for long with vegetables.*

We see that these responses represent the views of diverse participants who differ in terms of sex, age, and educational level, but who are mostly employed and therefore have some regular earned income. Despite evidence that they can afford processed foods, their responses indicate that these are not high on their lists of food preferences. These participants' responses point to a preference for indigenous African foods rather than modern western-type processed foods as they consider them to be healthier and more nutritious.

Participants' preferences for indigenous African foods over modern western foods suggest that indigenous foods continue to enjoy appreciation and recognition within the Mankon community, especially for their nutritional and health value. The nutritional value of indigenous food was established in previous studies. For instance, the study by Kouebou et al. (2013:490) on the nutritional composition of 117 staple traditional dishes in Cameroon that fall into four categories (i.e., sauces, complete meals, snacks, and starchy complements) found that the majority of 'these staple foods contain water between 60 and 80 g, energy between 100 and 200 kcal, proteins between 2 and 4 g, fats between 0 and 9 g, less than 6 g of available carbohydrates and less than 4 g of crude fibre'. These foods were also found to be highly rich in a wide variety of essential minerals such as potassium, iron, phosphorus, calcium, magnesium, and zinc. Kouebou et al. (2013) found that these dishes constitute frequently consumed staple foods in Cameroon and that they play an important role in nutrition.

This nutritional information on indigenous foods supports the assertion that they are vital to physical health as they provide nutrients that help to reduce incidences of non-communicable diseases such as diabetes (Malli et al., 2023: 2). This view is also supported by other previous studies on indigenous foods that argue that spices such as dichrostachys glomerata and tetrapleura treptatera used in the preparation of certain dishes, reportedly have preventive effects on obesity, type-2 diabetes, and metabolic syndrome. Other ingredients, and notably domngang and tchuinmogne, are said to have high contents of minerals including iron, calcium, magnesium and phosphorus. These minerals are considered essential to reduce the risk of anaemia and hypertension in diabetic patients (Nyangono et al, 2021:62). Foods such as fufu corn and palm oil were found to be, respectively, rich in methionine (an essential amino acid), and vitamins which serve as antioxidants protecting the body from cancer and infections. Most other foods are reported to be rich in fibre, which helps protect people from colon cancer, diabetes, and cholesterol, while simultaneously helping to improve insulin sensitivity (Nyangono et al, 2021:62).

That indigenous foods are both nutritious and medicinal is further eloquently articulated by Zulumathabo Zulu. According to Zulu (2022), in African indigenous medicine there is always a close connection between food and medicine. These, he argues, are available in the form of both water-based plants as food sources (such as seaweeds, kelp, sea moss, tlhatlha, mohaladitwe, and sehe, also known as spirulina which are all rich in slime and proteins), and animal species (such as whales, sharks, and other kinds of fish) that are used both as nutritional sources and as medication. They are also available through terrestrial plants such mokopu (okra), sun-dried herbs known as morogo wa mokhusa and madumbe (Zulu, 2022:87). The slime in these water-based plants, he argues, is both nutritionally and medicinally potent as it has glycoproteins, which are found in the lining of the stomach, mouth and lungs. These food sources help to heal diseases such as inflammations due to torn muscles and physical injuries, arthritis in joints (as they are rich in calcium), and poor metabolism, blood sugar level dysregulation and hormonal imbalance (as they are rich in iodine). These foods are also sources of antioxidants which help to remove free radicals in the body (Zulu, 2022: 88-90). These findings are supported by Kuhnlein and Receveur (1996: 421) who argue that 'many indigenous peoples do not separate plant species into those that are food and those that are medicine because the same item can be one, the other, or both at the same time'.

Lessons for indigenous foods in view of the covid-19 pandemic

The findings in the foregoing present a case for the preservation and promotion of indigenous foods due to their nutritional and health value. This is especially so in view of the historical impact of Western colonialism and its economic systems that introduced modern processed foods, presenting a threat to indigenous foods systems. The need for promotion and presentation of indigenous foods is even greater, in light of the recent covid-19 pandemic which plunged the entire globe into a health crisis, further aggravating food insecurity for the most vulnerable groups. Covid-19's impact exposed vulnerabilities of economies to unexpected shocks.

As Foka-Nkwenti et al. (2020) pointed out, food prices proved to be highly sensitive to shocks such as those experienced during the 2008 economic crisis marked by a steep rise in fuel prices, financial instability, climate crisis as well as human rights crises, all of which combined, disrupted the global food system. The recent outbreak of the covid-19 pandemic no doubt had a similar disruptive impact. As the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development's (OECD, 2020:2) report shows, the pandemic undermined food security and livelihoods in the poorest parts of the world where agricultural activities are labour intensive. In Africa, this impact was aggravated by yet another shock in a form of the outbreak of the war between Russia and Ukraine, which saw grain and cooking oil prices skyrocketing. Cameroon was particularly hard hit as the pandemic occurred amidst high levels of unemployment that saw a rise from 3.36% in 2018 to 3.43% in 2020. This aggravated the pre-existing conditions of hunger and malnutrition, resulting in increased food insecurity (Foka-Nkwenti et al., 2020:112).

Food insecurity is a phenomenon that occurs where there is either poor access to food to meet basic nutritional needs and/or disruption of food intake or eating patterns due to lack of money and other resources (Foka-Nkwenti et al., 2020:112). The opposite of food insecurity is food security, defined by the Food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO) as 'a situation that exists when all people, at all times, have physical, social, and economic access to sufficient, safe, and nutritious food that meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life' (cited in Aziz and Kum, 2020: 3).

During the lockdowns in Cameroon, agricultural and other economic activities came to a standstill due to restrictions on the movement of people and goods as governments sought to mitigate the pandemic and its rapid spread. Government measures to manage the covid-19 virus spread, such as social distancing and restrictions on movements, meant that those working in the value chain of food production, processing and distribution could not carry out their duties as usual (see OECD, 2020:3-4; and Foka-Nkwenti et al., 2020:114). While food obtained from commercial retail stores is sourced largely from commercial farms and involves substantial financial costs, the opposite is true of indigenous foods as they are mainly grown through subsistence farming by households. This makes them highly accessible and affordable for the poor and the vulnerable. It is therefore important to support and promote subsistence farming in indigenous food crops as it will help to reduce dependence on commercially grown and often processed food products. It will also help to improve self-sufficiency and food security for the poor and the vulnerable. As the findings in the preceding section show, the people of the Mankon community who participated in this study hold positive views and attitudes towards indigenous foods, which they know to be highly nutritious and healthy. Together with their sound knowledge of the indigenous foods – especially amongst the elderly and middle-aged members of the community, and despite a lack in similar knowledge amongst the youth – this serves as a good foundation to promote the production of these foods for self-reliance and self-sufficiency, which could prove essential during times of unexpected shocks.

We therefore concur with the recommendations based on studies such as Bin, Ofeh and Che (2020:37), that advocate for education of households on how to develop new sources of income and food strategies, with particular emphasis on agricultural activities. In the context of post-colonial Africa, such strategies would affirm the argument articulated by Mogomme Masoga with his theoretical concept of Afro-sensed, meaning Africans' innate awareness of their own identity and their 'sense' of identity, that is, of being African (Masoga, 2017:17). This concept, Masoga (2017) argues, invokes the African proverb which in indigenous African languages of Sesotho/Setswana, says 'Thai e e itseng metsi a yona' (translated into English, it reads as 'the fish that understands its waters', meaning that the fish's potency lies in the water). The concept has direct relevance to the need for Africans to achieve food security, self-reliance, and self-sufficiency. This begins with Africans' appreciation and understanding of the critical importance of their own precolonial modes of production and systems of livelihood, central to which is the subsistence farming of indigenous food products.

Concluding remarks

This article examined the state of indigenous foods in the Mankon community of Cameroon. Specifically, it explored the community's knowledge of their indigenous foods and their significance, and whether these foods continue to be part of their staples or whether there have been changes in their consumption, especially due to historical encounters with Western colonial and economic systems. The article also considered the issue of the covid-19 pandemic, its impact on food systems, and its implications for indigenous foods, food security, and self-reliance.

Our findings show that the people of Mankon community have sound knowledge of their indigenous foods, evidenced in their ability to list a wide range of such foods. The study's participants also expressed a preference for indigenous foods as they recognised their nutritional and health(medicinal) value over western modern processed foods. Notwithstanding this, we found that only the middle-aged and the elderly participants demonstrated knowledge of the foods' socio-cultural significance and meanings, while the youth evidently lacked the same knowledge. This, we argue, supports calls for the promotion of indigenous foods through educational campaigns targeted specifically at the youth for the purpose of knowledge transfer on these foods and their systems. The need for such promotional campaigns is further heightened against the backdrop of the recent covid-19 pandemic which had a disruptive impact on commercial food value chains, constricting food supplies and resulting in food insecurity. The situation has been particularly severe for vulnerable communities such as the Mankon, which tend to rely heavily on processed foods sold through retail stores. Subsistence farming in indigenous food crops would enhance food security for such vulnerable groups both during normal periods of stability and in difficult times of shocks created by outbreaks of pandemics such as covid-19.

As with any other study, the present one has its limitations. Specifically, its main limitation lies in the fact that it is qualitative in nature and therefore, over and above evidence from published secondary literature, its empirical findings are based on evidence from a sample of few members of the community. Thus, while the findings are revealing on the state of indigenous foods in the community, it is difficult to generalise them as adequately representative of the entire community or even the majority of the Makon people's views and knowledge. That being said, the qualitative nature of the study warrants special consideration in terms of its contribution to the body of knowledge and research on indigenous foods. This is especially so as most of the research on indigenous foods is largely quantitative, using evidence reviews and/or scoping reviews and statistical surveys that lack depth and probing of the reasons for the expressed attitudes and perceptions on indigenous foods.

Another limitation of this study is that, beyond the participants' expressed preferences and recognition of their indigenous foods' nutritional and health value, we did not probe further on the issue of the actual daily consumption of indigenous foods as compared to that of western processed foods. This should be pursued in future research on the same question for a thorough examination and analysis of Cameroonians' daily staples, not only in the Mankon community. Such future studies would benefit through comparative analysis of the state of indigenous foods in other parts of the African continent.

References

Aziz EM and Kum FV (2020) *The Impact of Covid-19 on Health & Food Security in Cameroon*. Yaounde, Cameroun: Nkafu Policy Institute.

Barthes R (1979) Towards a Psychosociology of Contemporary Food Consumption. In: Forster R and Ranum OA (eds) Food and drink in history : selections from the Annales, économies, sociétes, civilisations, volume 5. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, pp.166-173.

Bin JM, Ofeh MA and SB Che (2020) Impact of the Corona Pandemic on Household Welfare in Cameroon. *Journal of Economics and Management Sciences* 3(3):25-39. https://doi.org/10.30560/jems.v3n3p25

Brown AC (2008) Understanding food : principles and preparation. Belmont, CA: Thomson/Wadsworth.

Cayot N (2007) Sensory quality of traditional foods. Food Chemistry 101(1): 154-162.

Dorland WAN (2003) Dorland's illustrated medical dictionary. Philadelphia, PA: W. B. Saunders.

Douglas M (1984) *Food in the social order : studies of food and festivities in three American communities*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation.

Foka-Nkwenti C, Nguendo YHB, Noela AM and Nganou-Mouafo M (2020) COVID-19 and food insecurity in Cameroon. *GSC Advanced Research and Reviews* 5(2): 111-117.

Fox BA and Cameron AG (1995) *Food Science, Nutrition and Health (6th Editon)* London: Hodder Arnold.

Kouebou CP, Achu M, Nzali S, Chelea M, Bonglaisin J, Kamda A, Djiele P, Yadang G, Ponka R, Ngoh Newilah G, Nkouam G, Teugwa C and Kana Sop MM (2013) A review of composition studies of Cameroon traditional dishes: Macronutrients and minerals. *Food Chemistry* 140(3): 483-494.

Kuhnlein HV and Receveur O (1996) Dietary Change and Traditional Food Systems of Indigenous Peoples. *Annual Review of Nutrition* 16 (Volume 16, 1996): 417-442.

Malli A, Monteith H, Hiscock EC, Smith EV, Fairman K, Galloway T and Mashford-Pringle A (2023) Impacts of colonization on Indigenous food systems in Canada and the United States: a scoping review. *BMC Public Health* 23(1): 2105. https://doi.org/10.1186/s12889-023-16997-7

Masoga M (2017) *Making the Fish Understand its Water: Reflecting on Africanisation, Indigenous Knowledge and Decoloniality of Our Time*. Professorial Inaugural Lecture, University of Venda.

Namrata SL (2014) Globalisation and its Impact on Indigenous Food Habits and Culture of the Khasi Community of the North East. *International Journal of English Language Literature and Humanities* 2(2): 252-261.

Nyangono BCF, Ntentie R, Bouelet Ntsama Isabelle S, Magne Naoussi D, Ngobe Ewanke Elisabeth M, Nga Mang Glwadys N, Guimatio Teugou M, Salamatou, Dang ABE and Ngondi Judith L (2021) Macronutrient Values of Local Meals of Some Cameroonian Traditional Communities Living in Yaounde. *Journal of Food and Nutrition Sciences* 9(2): 57-63.

Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (2020) *COVID-19 and the Food and Agriculture Sector: Issues and Policy Responses*, Paris: OECD Publishing. https://read.oecd-ilibrary.org/view/?ref=130_130816-9uut45lj4q&title=Covid-19-and-the-food-and-agriculture-sector-Issues-and-policy responses

Raschke V, Oltersdorf U, Elmadfa I, Wahlqvist M, Kourisblazos A, and Cheema B (2007) The Need for an Online Collection of Traditional African Food Habits. *African Journal of Food Agriculture Nutrition and Development* 7(1): 1-22.

Sidiq FF, Coles D, Hubbard C, Clark B, and Frewer LJ (2022) The Role of Traditional Diets in Promoting Food Security for Indigenous Peoples in Low- and Middle-Income Countries: A Systematic Review. *IOP Conference Series*.

Earth and Environmental Science. 978 012001.

United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNPFII) (2000) Available at http://www.globalissues.org/article/693/rights-of-indigenous-people# (accessed on 9 September 2023).

Zulu Z (2022) Water-based Healing Treasures: An Interview with Mocholoko Zulumathabo Zulu. In Mapadimeng MS (ed). *Indigenous Knowledge Systems in the 21st Century – Recognising and Harnessing their Worth*. Capte Town, SA: Juta and Company (Pty) Ltd.

Grassroots food initatives at the rural-urban interface: Potential and constraints in Ankara

Paper first received: 30 November 2023; Accepted: 24 April 2024; Published in final form: 15 December 2024
https://doi.org/10.48416/ijsaf.v30i1.564

Esra DEMİRKOL COLOSIO[1] and Valerio COLOSIO[2]

Abstract

This article explores how grassroots associations in the food sector, implementing practices such as solidarity economy and agroecology, have responded to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic in Ankara. The COVID-19 pandemic had a major impact on Turkey's food supply chain, and this was particularly evident in a city like Ankara, where green spaces and agricultural production have shrunk dramatically over the past 30 years. The grassroots associations were born in response to the consumption of land and the commodification of food chains over the last 30 years. They aim to propose alternative practices to the dominant policies in the food chains, promoting local inputs, the protection of urban agricultural spaces, environmentally friendly techniques, short supply chains and urban-rural interactions. During the pandemic, the practices promoted by these groups have proved effective and resilient, managing to find new spaces and attention. We argue that this resilience is linked to the very structure of these initiatives and highlights the fragility of neoliberal Turkish development policies in the food sector. However, these networks were effective thanks to the strong social cohesion made possible by their small size, which effectively managed the changes during the pandemic. Extending this model in the post-pandemic context poses difficulties. Moreover, although some of their practices seem to be valued and implemented by municipal institutions, there is a risk that they will be used to alleviate specific problems and lose the transformative charge that grassroots associations attribute to them.

[1] Çankırı Karatekin University, Turkey
[2] University of Sussex, United Kingdom

Corresponding author: Esra Demirkol Colosio, esradc@karatekin.edu.tr

Biographical notes

Esra Demirkol Colosio has a PhD in Sociology and is an Assistant Professor at the Department of Sociology, Çankırı Karatekin University. Her work has focused on the dynamics of transnational families, with particular attention to the gender dimension, and on gender issues in access to land and agriculture in Turkey.

Valerio Colosio has a PhD in Anthropology and is currently a Research Associate at the University of Sussex. His work has focused on the social and political dynamics associated with the legacy of slavery in Sahelian Africa, where he has worked as both a researcher and a development practitioner; and on the role of grassroots associations in empowering socially and politically marginalised communities.

ISSN: 0798-1759 | This Journal is double blind refereed.

Introduction

This study analyses how networks of grassroots solidarity economy associations in the metropolitan municipality of Ankara dealt with the food price crisis triggered by the COVID-19 pandemic and aggravated by the start of the war in Ukraine and the unorthodox economic policies of the Turkish government. These factors led to skyrocketing inflation in food prices, which severely affected the socio-economic life of Turkey. The disruption of food chains during COVID-19 globally demonstrated the fragility of the current food system. The Turkish case is particularly interesting because the impact here has been very harsh due to sustained contraction of the agricultural sector coupled with unorthodox government economic policies. It can therefore provide interesting insights into opportunities for transformation in the post-COVID context.

We explore this issue through the lens of small grassroots solidarity economy associations in the metropolitan municipality of Ankara. These associations are increasing in importance in the food sector in Turkey, as government policies over the last 30 years have focused on strengthening corporations' capacity to export cash crops and prioritise the use of land for real estate investments and mining extraction rather than food production (Gajack and Peleck, 2019). Ankara is an advantageous point of observation for these dynamics: the city has faced a process of rapid urbanisation, but thanks to its geographical location and the attention paid to agricultural production in the early years of the republican period, it has maintained significant potential in terms of agricultural production (Sınacı Özfındık, 2019; Ribeiro et al., 2020). Grassroots associations present their activities as a revitalisation of urban farming, which was long an important activity in the geographical territory of the municipality of Ankara. We hypothesised that an investigation of how such efforts are impacted by the fluctuation of food prices could afford interesting insights into transformations of food systems in Turkey. Furthermore, we wished to ascertain whether the practices of these associations were proving to be resilient alternatives to the commodification of food and exposure to the market vagaries created by neoliberal reforms, and therefore whether they could offer guidance for the possible transformation of food policies in Ankara.

Scholars have recently analysed grassroots solidarity economy associations in relation to food chains in Ankara and their impact on food production (Atalan-Helicke and Abiral, 2021; Ay et al., 2023). In our research, we observed deep-rooted experiences and consolidated networks that already produced a good amount of practice and knowledge. We conducted an ethnographic assessment of these organisations: we collected most of the data between April 2022 and December 2023 and then started a still on-going process of discussion of them with the association involved. Although we noted structural limitations in term of the extension and impact of these experiences, we also saw their potential value in terms of advocacy and the promotion of alternative policies at the municipal level. Methodologically, we drew on classical ethnographic methods of anthropology, and particularly participant observations, as we are also members of some of the analysed associations. We worked together with activists and producers, exploring their social networks from within, as we assumed that only active engagement with them could lead to a full understanding of the knowledge and practices they produce on the ground. We started with cooperatives for food production and distribution of which we were already members, and then used snowball sampling to progressively contact wider networks of cooperatives relevant to our theoretical framework. We organised semi-structured interviews, participant observations, and discussions on the data with the participants, as the research also offered opportunities for self-reflection for them. In total, we interacted with ten associations and conducted interviews with 33 individuals, achieving variety both in terms of practices (i.e. food collectives, urban gardens, and cooperatives) and of the types of actors involved (i.e. producers, activists, and organisers). We triangulated the ethnographic data with documents produced by these networks of associations and with the existing literature. This article first contextualises the problem of food prices within the broader literature on moral economy, peasantry and food democracy. It then describes the main transformation of the food system in Ankara and the impact of the food price crisis that began in 2020. Finally, it offers an analysis of how associations have dealt with the food price crisis and the main consequences it has had for them, allowing us to draw some general

conclusions about their ability to deal with this issue.

Food, peasants, and agri-business from the neoliberal reforms of the 1980s to the COVID-19 pandemic: 'food regimes' under stress

Food exchange is at the centre of social life and, unsurprisingly, food prices have been a source of tension and revolt throughout history. The concept of 'moral economy' elucidates how deprivation of essentials, such as food, is generally deemed morally unacceptable and can consequently give rise to popular protests. James Scott's (1977) framing of 'moral economy' is rooted in the assumption that access to food must have been ensured in rural societies for which subsistence-oriented farming played a major role. However, the transition from a system in which everyone had access to land to produce what they needed for themselves, to a system in which the efficiency of the market was supposed to guarantee production volumes capable of providing food security for the whole of society, has often led to crises such as the frequent riots that Scott (1985) defines as 'peasants' revolts' when certain goods are not available on the expected terms. Globally, green revolutions and the liberalisation of food markets have shaped debates about food since the 1960s. These transformations boosted production to catch up with the growing global population but simultaneously led to the commodification of all elements of food chains, controlled and traded by a few powerful global actors. Philip McMichael (2009) uses the concept of 'food regimes' to describe this process, which has led to the rise of a small number of globally powerful agri-business actors specialised in specific crops or production inputs and exerting strong power. This process proceeded alongside a reduction of the agricultural workforce, with human labour replaced by machines, and consequent urbanisation. The focus of policymakers shifted to food security and famine prevention, based on the technocratic assumption that more efficient farming would boost production and prevent food shocks or famines.

This process significantly impacted the livelihood of rural communities, from which the first forms of resistance against it emerged. The first global peasant movements originated in Latin America and led to the creation of the large and influential La Via Campesina network, which linked peasant movements worldwide and played a major role in promoting the concept of 'food sovereignty' globally. The term 'peasant' connotes the idea that the people who work on the land do not produce exclusively for profit-making sales but rather base their livelihoods on broader control of the land with implicit resistance to the complete commodification of food production. Bernstein and Byres (2001) emphasise how the peasantry is not necessarily a conservative force protecting moral rules about food, but it has transformed over time with adaptations to different contexts and elaborations of original forms of both internal organisation and production. These movements are linked to political actors who criticise the massive exploitation of land and natural resources for its environmental impact and high social costs. The ideas of such movements initially emerged in a context where rural lifestyles intersected with indigenous customs and traditions based on a relationship with nature that is radically different from capitalist exploitation. They then spread in different forms and among other actors, united by the quest for localised and democratic control of the food chain (Resler and Hagolani-Albov, 2021; Oba and Özsoy, 2023). Hence, strategies such as direct interactions between buyers and producers or the promotion of agroecological techniques, which aim to regenerate most agricultural inputs, emerged as means of resistance to the control exerted by large corporations (Van Der Ploeg, 2021).

These practices originated to protect specific needs but gradually expanded and garnered attention among both global civil society and the urban dwellers constituting the final 'consumers' of foodstuffs. In addition to the idea of 'food sovereignty', which holds that each community has the right to produce and eat the food that they find to be culturally and ecologically suitable, the concept of 'food democracy' has become important. Food democracy stresses the need for all communities connected by food chains to play roles in the choices related to food, to assess the 'ecological risks and benefits', and consequently to 'respond collectively and accordingly' to those assessments. Hence, this concept does not contradict but rather complements food sovereignty, valuing the actions of 'urban food producers' as another means for progressing on paths to 'food system transformation' (Resler and Hagolani-Albov, 2021: 325). Among urban actors the commitment to a

different food chain emerged not only through the implementation of agroecological techniques and short chains in the green areas of cities, but also and more commonly through consumers' choices, the creation of food collectives, and what Jasmine Lorenzini (2019) defines as 'political lifestyles', such as veganism or vegetarianism. This framework reveals that current practices aimed at resisting the commodification of food chains may bring together rural workers and urban dwellers. Their common goal is to manage the food chain autonomously and cooperatively, although their strategies and agendas might differ.

The intersection of the agendas of these different actors is an engaging arena to explore. The COVID-19 crisis exposed many contradictions of the existing 'food regimes' and made this arena politically very relevant. While the discomfort caused by such social and environmental impacts has long been clear, the recognition of the risks they pose to food price stability is more recent. The COVID-19 pandemic triggered a global food price crisis that was subsequently exacerbated by the war in Ukraine. The FAO Food Price Index, which measures changes in the prices of groups of commonly consumed foods, rose from 95.1 before the pandemic to 143.7 in 2022, a level significantly higher than the 131.9 reached during the previous food price crisis in 2011. These global shifts in food prices are potentially problematic for some strata of the population and can have severe impacts on the poorest urban areas. We found the case of Ankara relevant because the dependence on external inputs impacted food prices very heavily, and because that impact simultaneously contributed to increased awareness about the relevant issues while also testing the resilience of grassroots associations and the limits of their transformative capacities.

Neoliberal agriculture, real estate, and unorthodox monetary policy: Turkey and Ankara at the time of Covid-19

The stress placed on food chains by the COVID-19 pandemic must be contextualised both within the wider transformation of the Turkish agricultural sector, which was self-sufficient for most of its food prior to the transformations described here, and within the identity of Ankara, an ancient settlement that is relatively young in terms of massive urbanisation. Turkey's transition towards an agri-food system based on private profit and exportation started in the 1970s. In the last 20 years, farmland has shrunk by about 20%, while the number of farmers has halved and the rural population now accounts for only 7.5% of the country (Yücer, 2020). Land gradually ceased to be an ancestral source of livelihood under the control of local communities and became a financial asset to be valued according to more rentable opportunities. Ankara's own history dates back to the Hittites and Phrygians, but until it became the capital of the Turkish Republic in 1923, it was a rural town. The rural character of the capital was not immediately lost; even in 1990, agricultural land still accounted for 54% of Ankara's total surface area and local producers remained important suppliers of agricultural products (Oncel and Levend, 2023). However, this landscape has changed radically in the last 30 years, as the harsher implementation of neoliberal policies has driven the massive expansion of urban areas. Agricultural land decreased to 39.8% in 2000, 18.7% in 2012, and only 9.7% in 2018, while artificial surfaces expanded to cover 82.5% of the total area (Oncel and Levend, 2023). The progressive shrinking of green areas together with urban sprawl and infrastructure expansion has displaced previous inhabitants, limited the space for agriculture, and increased prices and infrastructural demands (Varlı Görk and Rittesberg Tılıç, 2016; Sınacı Özfındık, 2019). Furthermore, neoliberal reforms have reduced the role of the state and delegated decisions about the urban development of the city to private interests, leading to top-down and market-oriented approaches to urban policies that have contributed to escalating property prices and the shrinking of agricultural land (Korkmaz and Balaban, 2020).

Similarly to the pattern observed globally, the first form of resistance to these transformations in Turkey came from rural areas, mainly through protests against mining exploitation or the construction of infrastructure jeopardising the livelihoods of rural people. A crucial actor in these movements was the Çiftçiler Sendikası, or Farmers Union, which claimed an identity as a peasant organisation to explicitly oppose these transformations in agriculture (Oba and Özsoy, 2023; Ribeiro, 2023). This momentum continued to grow, and movements of

peasants and local civil society groups became increasingly common in Turkey. Many large infrastructure projects triggered or are triggering resistance, and rural people are at the forefront of these protests. While in rural areas direct resistance to projects intended to exploit land for non-agricultural purposes is the main form of political expression, in urban areas dissent against mainstream neoliberal policies has emerged in the form of consumer choice and the associationism related to it. In this respect, it is worth mentioning the Buğday ('Wheat') Association for Supporting Ecological Living. Buğday began as a small market for local products in Bodrum in 1990 and subsequently became a national movement affiliated with the International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements (IFOAM) that now provides training in organic production and agroecological techniques to other associations. Although this type of effort was aimed at developing a different relationship between urban dwellers and their food, without necessarily pursuing acts of resistance, significant events have also occurred in urban centres. The most famous of these has been the Gezi Park movement, which started in Istanbul in 2013 and then spread across the country. This movement united a variety of grassroots actors calling for more participatory governance from the state, and one of its first demands was the protection of urban green areas as spaces of sociality and production (Korkmaz and Balaban, 2020). Here, the promotion of alternative approaches to production intersects with a broader national struggle to protect agricultural and pastoral lands, linking newer urban movements to broader dynamics that have been present in the country since the neoliberal reforms of the 1980s.

Gezi Park represented a moment of rupture that expressed discomfort with a model of development based on the heavy exploitation of natural resources, and it followed a global wave of grassroots protests where the occupation or alternative use of public urban space was common. After the repression of the Gezi Park movement, most of the actors who had fought to protect common spaces developed other forms of resistance. Analysing the movement against a new law on seeds in Turkey in 2006, Derya Nizam and Zafer Yenal (2020: 751) use the term 'quiet activism' to define a challenge to the dominant mode of production through 'small, everyday, embodied actions' and moments of socialisation to share criticisms and experiences that also apply to most of the associations we worked with in this study. The discomfort with neoliberal transformations created a variety of localised social movements that mixed direct protest with the creation of networks aimed at developing alternative practices based on direct democracy and protection of the environment. Eric Dacheux and Daniel Goujon (2011) frame these in the context of 'solidarity economy', a type of 'transition' economy aimed at transforming society with a focus on the needs of excluded groups. Olivier Gajack and Selin Pelek (2019) emphasise the connection between decentralisation and solidarity economy initiatives, and the efforts of such initiatives to bridge gaps in terms of local democracy and representativity.

While grassroots movements in rural areas of Turkey remained active in trying to protect those areas from major construction, in urban areas consumer sensitivity regarding the quality of food and relationships with producers increased among the upper middle class. The development of a network of organic markets and products reflects the expansion of this interest throughout the country in the last decade, and research on food habits during COVID-19 has demonstrated a growing focus of consumers on food quality as well as on shorter supply chains (Akdemir et al., 2020; Guney and Sangun, 2021). These movements have continued to grow in terms of numbers of active members, and some cooperatives, such as Buğday in Istanbul or Ovacık in Tunceli, have managed to develop projects, open shops, and create networks nationwide. However, these movements have largely remained on the local level, acting for the protection of specific green areas – in Ankara, for example, the protection of Atatürk Forest or the green areas around Middle East Technical University – without structuring a nationwide movement.

The COVID-19 crisis further highlighted some of the weaknesses in Turkish food chains targeted by these associations. In Turkey, the first measures to contain the pandemic were launched in March 2020, and until July 2021 there were frequent restrictions on the mobility of citizens. Many office jobs were carried out online with the implementation of remote work, while agricultural work was to be carried out with specific permits. The difficulty of recruiting labour for field activities and the global rise in the prices of commodities

significantly increased food prices. These dynamics were further aggravated by the unorthodox monetary policy of the government, which led to a spectacular devaluation of the Turkish lira: in January 2020, 1 US dollar was worth less than 6 Turkish lira, while four years later 1 US dollar was worth more than 32 Turkish lira. This was the most relevant factor that impacted food prices, which are tightly connected to the currency exchange rate (Orkun Oral et al., 2023). Hence, food inflation severely affected Turkey; from rates of about 10% in 2019, food inflation increased to 20% in 2020 and over 40% in 2021. These rates then regularly exceeded 90% for most of 2022 and hovered between 50% and 70% between 2023 and the first semester of 2024, according to the Turkish Statistical Institute (TÜİK).[1]

The government developed two main strategies to curb food inflation: it expanded state-subsidised cooperatives and bakeries, which guaranteed basic foods at lower prices, and it reduced taxes on food imports, especially cereals, for which import duties were completely cancelled in 2021. Michaël Tanchum (2021) emphasises how these measures were linked to a structural weakness in the Turkish economy. As most of its domestic production has to feed the export sector, the country is not self-sufficient in several sectors, including cereals and other agricultural products. Furthermore, intensive production for exportation is based on the use of inputs such as chemical fertilisers and pesticides, the prices of which are strongly influenced by the global supply chain. High management costs have contributed to the indebtedness of a large proportion of agricultural operators (Altaytas, 2024). Finally, this type of production, combined with the increasingly intense phenomena of climate change, has a strong impact on water resources, which have become problematic in recent years for large urban centres such as Istanbul and Ankara and for small-scale agricultural production, which suffers greatly from water scarcity (Ahsan et al., 2023).

The COVID-19 pandemic imposed significant stress on the Turkish food supply chain, exposing vulnerabilities related to its neoliberal transformations. The associations considered in this study describe their practices as attempts to respond to those problems and to outline alternative uses of urban land and resources to replace those of the last decades. In this framework, urban cooperatives and grassroots networks of food exchange simultaneously represent an adaptation to the harsher social consequences of neoliberal policies, an effort to produce alternative networks of exchange, and a tool of contestation (Dacheux and Goujon, 2011; Oba and Özsoy, 2023). In Ankara, these networks have generally managed to mobilise a few thousand people in the city centre to support relatively small groups of smallholders in the agricultural areas close to the city or on its periphery. Their main aims are to create cohesion among people sharing similar worldviews, and to influence public opinion by proposing and implementing different practices. This is consistent with a broader shift towards a focus on local production partially embraced in the last few years by the Metropolitan Municipality of Ankara and other big cities. Some local governments have been diverging from national policies and testing new policies for urban food production and support for organic methods and short supply chains (Ay et al., 2023).

We noticed how the practices previously developed by these associations before the COVID-19 pandemic were in some ways more resilient during the pandemic than those of traditional food chains and sometimes even allowed the associations to enlarge their bases. In this sense, one outcome of the COVID-19 crisis might be an increased awareness of the socio-economic issues related to agri-business and of the ways in which alternative models might be more resilient to supply chain shocks. It is important to note that the food price crisis triggered by COVID-19 did not stop in Turkey as the pandemic began to abate; the impact of the government's unorthodox monetary policies led to the continuation of skyrocketing inflation, which is still significant at the time of writing (June 2024). Hence, the socio-economic issues related to the food price crisis are still very much present on local political agendas and remained under debate while our research was ongoing.

Transformations and continuities in Ankara during the COVID-19 crisis

[1] https://data.tuik.gov.tr/Kategori/GetKategori?p=enflasyon-ve-fiyat-106&dil=2, last accessed 02 July 2024.

COVID-19 was a unique public health crisis on the global level that heavily impacted food consumption. The pandemic further highlighted issues related to food chain transformations that were already being tackled by Turkish civil society and contributed to an increase in the general awareness of the quality and prices of food supplies. The connection between the crisis triggered by the COVID-19 pandemic and the longstanding problems existing within Turkish food chains was clear to the participants of this study, as was the potential importance of the practices that these associations were using to deal with it. In this section, we summarise the main dynamics of the selected associations in dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic, with a specific focus on 'resilience'. This term defines the capacity to resist or react to shocks. Katrina Brown (2015) identifies resistance, rootedness, and resourcefulness as the key elements of resilience in situations of distress, emphasising the transformative power that resilience can have as a unique form of resistance. We assess how this definition of resilience is fitting for the ways in which Ankara-based associations reacted to and emerged from the COVID-19 crisis and attendant food price inflation.

We began our analysis with four main established associations: the Natural Food and Conscious Nutrition Network (DBB: Doğal Besin Bilinçli Beslenme Ağı), the Güneşköy Cooperative, the Tahtacıörencik Village Ecological Living Collective (TADYA: Tahtacıörencik Doğal Yaşam Kolektifi), and the Yüzüncü Yıl Food Cooperative (YYGT: Yüzüncü Yıl Gıda Topluluğu). These associations were created between 2000 and 2013, while smaller associations mentioned later in this article are often offshoots of these initiatives. The DBB is a network that aims to connect different types of cooperatives nationwide according to a common agroecological and socially sustainable approach to production. Güneşköy is a cooperative that manages a plot of land of about 7.5 hectares at the boundary between the provinces of Ankara and Kırıkkale. Their aim is to train farmers in agroecological and organic farming. On an annual basis, they also supply weekly packages of fresh produces to activists who financially support their farming activities in advance for the duration of the season, i.e. May to October. TADYA is a cooperative involving different smallholder farmers working on about 5 hectares in the rural area of Güdül, a small municipality in Ankara province. Its core comprises a few dozen producers and committed activists, while its outer network of less involved activists supporting the association's activities is estimated to be as large as 1,500 people.[2] TADYA has been distributing fresh products since 2011 through an online system where people can order weekly deliveries. The YYGT is a food collective that began as a resistance movement during the Gezi Park protests. The group now cultivates a small garden, or bostan in Turkish, and arranges the regular purchase of food from small cooperatives outside Ankara. There are currently about 35 households ordering regularly from ten different producers, although these numbers tend to vary.

Although united by a focus on food, the practices of these groups are diverse. Some try to make the most of existing green spaces, focusing on local production, seed exchanges, and processing techniques such as pickling, drying, or making pastes and molasses. Others actively obtain products from producers who follow the same principles in other provinces, with the aim of consolidating long-standing relationships with them. We anticipated that this diversity could yield different ideas on potential strategies in this sector while also outlining common elements. We first analysed two important factors for resilience: the implementation of agroecology strategies to reduce dependence on external factors, and the creation of cohesive networks of solidarity to react to changes. We then analysed the limits of the 'resilience' of these associations' practices, particularly focusing on their capacity to work effectively with different social classes in a complex urban area.

Solidarity as a factor of resilience? The importance of social networks in dealing with the COVID-19 crisis

Agroecology emerged as a common productive strategy among all the associations analysed. They put forward various reasons for choosing this strategy: agroecological techniques have less environmental impact, enable the revival of traditional local practices, require less credit at the beginning, and make products more palatable for people seeking 'organic' or 'healthy' food. In addition to these points, we noticed an important element in

[2] https://tahtaciorencik.org/tadya-hakkinda/, accessed on 2 July 2024.

relation to COVID-19 and the subsequent crises: agroecological techniques made the producers using them less vulnerable to external shocks, as most of their inputs were self-produced, while also empowering the activists by improving their capacity for storing and managing food products.

The associations developed these techniques in different contexts through different means. In the case of TADYA, we observed a strong emphasis on the importance of seeds; every year this association tries to renew its stocks of seeds to reduce dependence on markets. It also studies neglected local seeds to facilitate the use of specific locally suitable crops. Similarly, Güneşköy and MoniBostan, two of the other associations analysed, act as collectors of various local seeds that they store and exchange freely among members. These associations follow the same rationale in focusing on seeds; they seek to reproduce seeds as much as possible with special attention to local crops that are more appropriate for the local climate and soil quality. Additionally, the community garden of Middle East Technical University, ODTÜ Bostan, has developed practices aimed at valuing the wild products of forests as a result of its connection to the university's forests, which are some of the larger remaining forested areas in Ankara. Sharing seeds prevents the need to buy new ones every year, thus reducing dependence on the market and emphasising a non-commodified approach to these goods. Valorising wild fruits and herbs from forested areas in an urban setting reinforces awareness of the importance of these areas in the city and guarantees products independent of market fluctuations, albeit within a limited range.

According to our participants, although agroecology production is more expensive than traditional methods, producers who embraced this approach suffered less from the wave of inflation as most traditional agricultural inputs were self-produced or not used at all. However, when we tried to triangulate this information with direct observations of prices, our findings became more complicated. In systems with strong social control, price increases tended to be slower and there was often negotiation about prices between the producers and the activists. In the case of Güneşköy, the amount to be paid is decided in advance as activists and producers share the risk. TADYA's prices do not automatically follow market fluctuations; rather, they are established collectively by the producers, who decide together which products to prepare for sale (e.g. fresh fruits and vegetables, dried or processed fruits and vegetables, or dairy and meat products) and at what price. In some cases we noticed that the difference between the prices of these producers and those of wholesale markets had decreased since the beginning of the pandemic, others had remained stable, and a few had slightly increased as very local factors of production impacted these decisions. Hence, in spite of our participants' statements, we could not quantitatively identify a specific trend. Three important points may explain the perceptions of the participants in this regard. First, changes in prices within these networks were always announced and discussed in advance and gradually implemented, in contrast to the market, where they might occur abruptly. Second, most of the participants were likely to purchase food from supermarkets or weekly open-air markets in the central parts of the city, where the increase from wholesale prices was higher due to the higher transportation costs of the products and the rent paid by retailers in those areas. Finally, the considered networks only offer seasonal products and have fixed 'transaction' costs for their weekly deliveries, which might have facilitated a better absorption of any price increases, especially if activists maximised their groceries with weekly deliveries. Overall, these dynamics and the trust among the members of the networks contributed to the strengthening and consolidation of the networks, challenging the general perception of alternative food products necessarily being much more expensive than conventional products:

> *I think there is not much difference in price between TADYA's products and those in the market. Not a lot when we look at it. But most people have a perception that organic equals more expensive.*[3]

> *…there is still a perception of things, they say organic, organic products are expensive and so on… I could also say that before, but now I can't. So, when I really look at the prices, it looks almost the same… But it seems to me that it will take some time for us to break that perception.*[4]

[3] Participant from TADYA, Ankara, March 2023.
[4] Participant from Güneşköy, Ankara, April 2023.

These practices contribute to the strengthening of the skills and competencies of the activists involved in the networks for promoting local resources, seeking seasonal products, and managing their own simple 'production processes' by making pickles, molasses, or pastes at home, thus becoming 'prosumers', rather than simply 'consumers'. These are strategies that helped guide better individual choices during the crisis and offered opportunities to small producers. As these techniques do not require expensive inputs or credits and the associations are available to help with start-up, the networks tend to involve small farmers who are interested in developing all or part of their production in a solidarity-based and environmentally friendly way. We observed a relevant network of bostan gardens around the city that developed in collaboration with these larger groups, sometimes, as in the case of MoniBostan in Gölbaşı, creating their own local networks.

The valorisation of local seeds and techniques for storing agricultural products initially began as a reaction to the reduction of biodiversity and a desire to revive forms of 'local knowledge', from local seeds and edible wild vegetables to the ability to farm, process, and cook those products. During our research, most of the participating activists explained that agroecology is not simply a farming technique; rather, it is part of a holistic approach to create alternative patterns of farming and distribution. Together with their agroecological techniques, the associations made efforts to take control of plots of land and manage them with more democratic and inclusive practices. They proposed an alternative system in this regard, in line with the experiences described by Gajack and Pelek (2019) and with their aim of facilitating a transition towards a different global system of food production and distribution. The pandemic seems to have heightened this awareness. A member of the YYGT stated that it was thanks to COVID-19 that he came to understand the fragility of global food chains:

> *The system we trust so much is not so logical… [it's not logical] that the lentils come from Canada, here they come from here, from there, that is, with the risk of [limited] access to food in a global crisis, and at the same time, it brings food inflation. That's why I realised how important a short food chain location is, at least for myself. That's why I think it's very valuable to obtain a product directly from a producer, directly from the person who produces it, that is, economically, because the producer can actually access what he produces there.*[5]

Another common feature described by the associations was their bottom-up origins as social networks of people linked by common interests who started acting together and gradually involved more people sharing similar approaches and needs. Since participation in their various activities is entirely voluntary, and has grown through word of mouth, the bonds between the members of these groups are quite strong. As regards the main practices developed by these groups, food is largely a medium of exchange for developing non-market-oriented social ties, common decision-making processes, and the sharing of risks and benefits related to agriculture through alternative forms of governance. These practices strengthen individuals' capabilities through shared experiences and mutual control and support. This was of particular importance during the difficulties that arose with the pandemic, as despite the restrictions imposed on travel and the consequent obstacles to carrying out the cultivation and distribution of agricultural products, the networks managed to guarantee the continuity of their distribution through mutual support. We believe that the strength of their relationships and the flexibility of the tools used had a decisive impact in making these groups 'resilient' during the pandemic, and these are among the major advantages of their approach:

> *Covid somehow reinforced our activities: we were allowed to travel and bring food home to people. Moreover, many people moved back to the village, so there was more manpower and more activities in the village.*[6]

The testimony above comes from TADYA, a group that also aims to create connections between different areas of the city and to enhance livelihoods in the village where most of the producers are based – Tahtacıörencik, in the district of Güdül, around 80 km north-west of the central district of Ankara – as the lack of local work has led many of the village's inhabitants to migrate to other areas. The restrictions imposed in response to COVID-19 and the introduction of remote work encouraged some of those people to return to the village, allowing TADYA to involve more people in its processes of land management. At the same time,

[5] Participant from TADYA who was also a member of the YYGT, Ankara, March 2023.
[6] Participant from TADYA, Ankara, October 2022.

travel restrictions significantly promoted online shopping, even among those who preferred to buy their food products directly from producers, and this offered new expansion opportunities not only in terms of the people to be involved in production but also among prosumers who regularly ordered products online. It is also worth noting that most of the COVID-19 restrictions were not applied in the same way to those engaged in agricultural work, which further fostered interest in actively engaging in farming. This facilitated the activities of groups such as TADYA, as well as those of most of the bostan gardens in Ankara, contributing to strengthening solidarity and cohesion during the pandemic:

> *During Covid, the bostan has actually been a good benefit. Since we have an open-air venue, we were able to continue meeting there. We didn't have to be confined to our homes.*[7]

> *These agricultural activities offered us an opportunity; we could go out together with the appropriate document and they couldn't keep you inside when you said you would be working in the field. It had such an effect on us.*[8]

These practices fostered a sense of belonging related to the previously mentioned 'quiet activism', in contrast to being a mere 'ethical consumer'. This is why we define the participants of these networks as 'activists' or 'prosumers': they engaged with these associations to actively contribute to an alternative model, without viewing the associations as simply abstract 'ethical producers' or labelling institutions that certify products. The practice of community control thus performed the dual function of reducing producers' operational costs and strengthening ties with their members, both of which contributed to the resilience of networks during COVID-19. The DBB states this openly as a principle of the association:

> *An 'organic product certificate' is not compulsory to be a DBB producer. The underlying aim of this is to get rid of the intermediary role of certification firms and promote natural agricultural methods beyond organic production methods. The basic criterion concerning the products and production methods is mutual trust. The group participants are encouraged to pay individual or group visits to production sites.*[9]

Although this approach is now shared by all the associations, we did hear concerns about the possibility of people misusing this system, especially if the networks expand and community control becomes more difficult. Furthermore, while for TADYA the mix of farmers engaged in production and volunteers supporting their methodologies has made community control effective, for other associations in which volunteers are the main element, keeping the group cohesive and active is more challenging. Personal motivation and decision-making by consensus are strengths in moments of difficulty, but they are also challenges for the long-term sustainability of these associations. Although the networks are resilient and managed to expand during the COVID-19 pandemic, most of their activities are based on voluntary engagement and require a strong and constant commitment. The possibility of and capacity for maintaining such engagement depends on a variety of factors including time availability, social capital, and financial resources, which are not accessible for everyone and do not always transcend the divide between rural and urban areas or the class divide in a city such as Ankara. The 'everyday life' engagement demanded by these associations can indeed be achieved only under specific conditions, therefore constituting a limit on how much they can expand in the post-COVID-19 future.

Changing our 'everyday life'? The quest for a new urban-rural balance

The French sociologist Henri Lefebvre (1991) introduced the concept of 'everyday life' in social science as a crucial and understudied site of exploitation in the capitalist system. The COVID-19 pandemic, by forcing people to radically reorganise their everyday lives due to the limitations imposed by health authorities, has contributed in some ways to strengthening networks of solidarity and collaboration. This has demonstrated how a radical reorganisation of the management of everyday life is important for the effective implementation of alternative food supply chain management practices. The requirements in terms of the time needed for activities such as visiting farming sites, ordering food, or processing larger volumes of vegetables during the

[7] Participant from the Berkin Elvan Bostan, Ankara, April 2023.
[8] Participant from TADYA who was also a member of the YYGT, Ankara, March 2023.
[9] https://dogalbilinclibeslenme.wordpress.com/dbb-ureticileri/, accessed January 2022.

harvest season are challenging for people with limited amounts of time. This is particularly true for groups that distribute food regularly, such as Güneşköy which delivers parcels of fresh vegetables every week. As these associations are small, it is necessary for their members to make significant commitments, and the absence of a few key members may have a huge impact on the whole group. During our research, we observed some periods of minor disruptions for that reason. The only significant issue that has emerged in the post-COVID period is the cancelling of the vegetable package programme in Güneşköy in 2024, due to ongoing issues since the construction of the high-speed railway divided their land. For bostan gardens, having enough regularly committed people working in the gardens is similarly a crucial issue. The COVID-19 pandemic had no impact on this type of fragility, but the difficulty people face in finding time to regularly dedicate to the associations' activities makes this a structural issue. It is important to note that these problems all emerged in the post-COVID period, when the 'everyday life' of most participants returned to the pre-pandemic routine.

Apart from changes in daily routines during COVID-19, in a province like Ankara comprising different kinds of urban neighbourhoods and villages, it is crucial to consider the class divide, which has a heavy structural impact on access to food. In most of the relevant urban cases we found in the literature, there is a core of urban activists who have the time and resources to create ties to committed rural producers, hence fostering solidarity at the urban-rural nexus and promoting alternative, transformative agroecological practices. However, it is difficult to achieve an extensive expansion of these networks. Based on the experiences of food cooperatives in Seferihisar, in Izmir province, Derya Nizam and Zafer Yenal (2020) identified a limitation in the relatively low number of activists who could be involved and the related dependence on seasonal tourists to keep the system working. Furthermore, in Ankara, we observed the difficulty of extending the model to poorer neighbourhoods of the city. We found that most of the participants in these networks are from central upper middle-class areas, while the lower classes tend to rely on cheaper brands from large retailers or subsidised shops run by state entities. The associations could not overcome the dichotomy of wealthy central areas purchasing from poorer peripheral areas.

Although the imbalance between participants in peripheral rural areas, who produce food, and residents in the city centre, who purchase it, seems to be a limitation, the fostering of strong ties between the two is important for spreading and keeping alive the practices and knowledge of the peripheries. We noticed that the disruptions created by COVID-19 partially alleviated this imbalance by facilitating the return of some citizens to their villages. Güneşköy and TADYA organise regular visits to their production sites and have managed to secure funding from international donors to develop specific programs for training and awareness, thus fostering skills and interest in developing alternative production practices on the outskirts of Ankara. However, these dynamics also present a risk for the objectives of the associations, namely a risk of gentrification of certain peri-urban areas. The growing interest in peri-urban areas that arose during the COVID-19 pandemic immediately impacted prices and the potential use of lands in green areas not far from more urbanised areas, such as Gölbaşı, a farmed area located about 20 km south of the centre of Ankara:

> *While the prices for [property in a district] in Çorum province were the same, Gölbaşı was around 4 times and 5 times as much. Now Gölbaşı has increased to 20 times and 30 times the [previous] price. Prices did not rise simply because inflation rose. The rent value here has also increased. The fact that people turned their eyes this way after the pandemic, and the fact that they turned away [from other areas] after the earthquakes [of February 2023], made this place much more valuable.*[10]

The bostan of MoniBostan aims to protect its land from the expansion of the city, but increased property values due to the interest in peri-urban areas triggered by the COVID-19 pandemic constitute a threat to its survival. At present, the whole area is used for farming and there is easy access to water, which has enabled the association to expand. However, new construction projects may quickly and heavily impact it. Hence, its post-Covid future will probably depend on the outcome of social struggles over property in Gölbaşı.

This is a very important topic that we discussed with most of the organisers and it remains the major

[10] Participant from MoniBostan, Ankara, April 2023.

structural limitation of their approach. The effort to engage potentially vulnerable small-holder producers who use agroecological techniques, and the implications for networks of food activists prepared to invest time and energy supporting alternative types of production, facilitate connections between urban and rural areas. However, the urban networks were quite localised within residential upper middle-class areas of the city. While these networks were able to engage with specific peri-urban or rural areas connected to them, they struggled to expand beyond those areas to involve more vulnerable urban dwellers. The difficulty of applying political strategies to overcome the class divide, which was further increased by neoliberal policies and economic crises, remains the main limitation of these associations and is still a controversial political topic among the activists. Moreover, the increased interest in peri-urban areas among urban dwellers comes with the risk of gentrifying those areas and thus further marginalising the vulnerable and exacerbating the class divide. While considering these issues, it is important to remember that the main purpose of these networks is not to diffuse alternative practices by competing with and replacing traditional models, but rather to develop advocacy efforts and networks capable of impacting broader policies, thus supporting a 'transition' toward more socially and ecologically friendly models. Associations can serve as inspiration for such transitions, but those efforts need to be supported by politically driven processes.

Solidarity networks during the food price crisis

Our findings on the resilience of grassroots associations in Ankara were mixed. The associations and their practices largely proved to be resilient to the challenges of COVID-19 and, in some cases, managed to expand their bases of support even as the pandemic was exacerbating many problems. Crises constitute fine opportunities to discuss contradictions that otherwise often go unnoticed. We previously mentioned the role of the Gezi Park protests in launching the YYGT collective, which followed a common trend in relation to the 2008 global financial crisis whereby protests animated by various collectives of activists survived and have continued to draw attention to the issues of green spaces and land consumption (Rakopoulos, 2014; Bettinelli, 2017; Cappuccini, 2017). These movements constitute the basis of the urban 'quiet activism' through which such ideas have circulated in Turkey in the last decade. In all of these cases, economic crises or other events that highlighted the social instability of the city have been catalysts of movements capable not only of expressing discomfort and protest but also of initiating solidarity practices that are themselves capable of strengthening the resilience of specific social groups. The COVID-19 pandemic foregrounded problems that were already identified, and has demonstrated the ability of these associations to offer alternatives via their policies, following a trend across Turkey of trying to value local crops and traditional ways of processing and conserving food (Oba and Özsoy, 2023). In a city like Ankara, this strategy overlaps with efforts to protect existing belts of farmland and integrate them into networks of exchange that unite urban and rural areas. This practice has the dual aim of reducing the need for imported food and protecting green areas as common goods, and it has the potential to partially emancipate small peri-urban farmers from market instability and credit risks, thanks to the reduced need for external inputs. Hence, we can describe these associations and their practices as 'resilient', emphasising the transformative dimension of resilience through resistance, rootedness, and resourcefulness (Brown 2015).

Overall, Turkish solidarity economy associations have been gaining importance in the last decade (Gürel, 2018; Gajack and Pelek, 2019) in light of the social setbacks of neoliberal reforms that have impacted various strata of society (Öztürk et al., 2020). Following the repression of the Gezi Park movement, these associations had to focus on specific local issues, creating networks and developing locally resilient practices. In Ankara, they have been working on and interacting with alternative strategies for food production and distribution, sharing similar goals, practices, and strategies. They are acting to transform specific urban spaces and use those spaces as models to influence the governance of the city, following a global trend in urban food policies (Sonnino and Coulson, 2020). This type of practice is spreading within the official governance documents of various provinces, including Ankara, where the municipality is gradually beginning to consider certain small changes to the urban planning approaches that have been applied for the last 30 years (Ay et al., 2023). This is taking place against a background of municipalities emerging as crucial actors within the framework of policies

aimed at boosting 'food democracy' (Resler and Hagolani-Albov, 2021). However, there are relevant structural limitations to be considered.

The actions of these associations and their agendas cannot be defined simply as the protection of rural areas against urban expansion, but rather as a quest for a radical revision of the relationship between the two realms, which is necessary for agroecological practices to be widely impactful. The emphasis on the transformation of both production and distribution led us to a critique of the 'everyday' forms of exploitation in the capitalist system that reduce individuals' available time for taking care of common goods. This confirmed the importance of voluntary engagement, time availability, and social capital for these practices to be effective, which led us to recognise their main limitations. As similar cases in the literature have also shown, it is indeed difficult for the associations to promote broader structural changes through these practices. Alison Alkon and Julie Gutman (2017) describe the limitations of alternative food chains in effectively addressing the structural problems of large-scale distribution at accessible prices. Their work built on Patricia Allen's (2008) observation about difficulties in going beyond the inclusion of more privileged classes which have time and resources to engage with alternative food chains. These observations align with both our experiences in Ankara and the observations of Derya Nizam and Zafer Yenal (2020) regarding food cooperatives in Seferihisar, and this is still a widely debated issue among activists today. Moving from these reflections, we finally identified three main limitations in the practices developed by the associations: the difficulties in maintaining a shared system of values and cohesion while expanding their range of action; the difficulties to overcome the class divide and include vulnerable urban actors; and finally, the risk of their practices being 'tokenised', or adopted only for political purposes after being purged of all transformative potential. A political initiative is indeed necessary to move the practices of these associations from a role of sensitisation and advocacy to a 'transformative' dimension. The evolution of the food supply chain in the vast urban areas of Ankara in the coming years will allow us to evaluate these ongoing trends.

Conclusions

This study has examined the responses of grassroots solidarity economy associations in Ankara to the food price crisis resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic, further compounded by the war in Ukraine and the unorthodox economic policies of the Turkish government. These factors contributed to a significant increase in food price inflation, which has had a severe impact on Turkey's socio-economic well-being and has highlighted the vulnerability of its food systems. We set out to explore whether the solidarity economy model implemented by grassroots associations in Ankara proved to be resilient to the problems raised by the COVID-19 pandemic or offered alternative approaches to addressing those problems. The networks of associations with which we worked were found to have been resilient. The main factors that allowed these associations to survive and, in some cases, expand their activities during the pandemic were strong social cohesion among group members, reduced dependence on external inputs and the credit market, and growing interest in environmental protection and high-quality food. Even at the level of municipal institutions, we noticed an interest in the agroecological and short supply chain practices proposed by these associations. In this sense, some elements of the practices proposed by these associations are attracting broader post-COVID-19 public opinion and might therefore find room for expansion in the future.

We have also highlighted important risks and limitations in the post-COVID-19 period for these associations. First, the consolidation and expansion of such experiences necessarily requires a broader review of the production system. Practices such as community control or the strong engagement of members in following agricultural seasonality and guaranteeing the self-production of inputs require a level of commitment that is difficult to combine with current styles of 'everyday life'. The changes that occurred during the pandemic paradoxically facilitated advantageous dynamics for these associations, which will be difficult for them to reproduce with the return to standard rhythms and workloads. While resilience against the effects of the pandemic generated alternative possibilities and strategies, the sustainable implementation of those strategies requires deeper economic and political transformations. On this point, the ideals of the peasant movements

coincide with the aim of these associations to change the current economic model, promote old practices, and prevent the social marginalisation of rural workers. The associations emphasised the need for a stronger connection between urban and rural areas and, therefore, the need to create networks of solidarity that transcend the division of peasants and urban dwellers. The dynamics of real estate prices already affecting some peri-urban areas reflect the difficulties in putting this ideal into practice and, more generally, the limits of the 'quiet activism' often associated with urban movements of food democracy. This is a limitation already described for most urban initiatives for 'food democracy', which aim to bring environmental protection and alternative production practices into urban political arenas, but can be tokenised, greenwashed or reduced to 'ethical consumption'. Municipalities and other actors may thus adopt specific practices to address weaknesses in food chains rather than aiming to radically transform them. Connecting urban and rural activists and engaging with municipal authorities to implement alternative policies are actions that have the potential to bring about political changes. However, there are major structural obstacles that still prevent the establishment of an alternative post-COVID food chain. Stronger political initiatives are needed to build on these experiences and achieve more ambitious goals.

References

AHSAN, M. M., TANRIVERMİŞ, Y. and TUNA, M. (2023) Water security challenges of Ankara City in Turkey: Lessons from climate change impact and the COVID-19 pandemic, World Water Policy, 9(2), pp. 204–220.

AKDEMİR, S., KOUGNIGAN, E., KESKİN, F., YILDIZ, A. and MIASSI, Y. (202) Effects of Covid-19 on food consumption habits in Turkey, International Conference on COVID-19 Studies, 21-23 June 2020, Ankara, Turkey.

AYDIN, Z. (2010) Neo-liberal transformation of Turkish agriculture, Journal of Agrarian Change, 10(2), pp. 149–187.

ALKON, A. and GUTHMAN, J. (eds) (2017) The new food activism: Opposition, cooperation, and collective action. University of California Press.

ALLEN, P. (2008) Mining for justice in the food system: Perceptions, practices, and possibilities, Agriculture and human values, 25, pp.157-161.

ALTAYTAS, K.M. (2024) Agrarian change in neoliberal Turkey: Insights from privatization of the sugar industry, Journal of Agrarian Change, 24(1).

ATALAN-HELICKE, N. and ABIRAL, B. (2021) Alternative food distribution networks, resilience, and urban food security in Turkey during the COVID-19 pandemic, Journal of Agriculture, Food Systems, and Community Development, 10(2), pp. 1-16.

BETTINELLI, M.F. (2017) La città ambientata. Idee e pratiche di nature nel quartiere Isola di Milano. (Doctoral dissertation, University of Milan – Bicocca). University of Milan – Bicocca Open Archive. https://boa.unimib.it/handle/10281/190340

BERNSTEIN, H. and BYRES, T. (2001) From Peasant Studies to Agrarian Change, Journal of Agrarian Change 1(1), pp. 1 – 56.

BROWN, K. (2015) Resilience, development and global change. London: Routledge.

CAPPUCCINI, M. (2017) Austerity and Democracy in Athens: Crisis and Community in Exarchia. Palgrave Macmillan, Cham.

DACHEUX, E. and GOUJON, D. (2011) The solidarity economy: An alternative development strategy?, International Social Science Journal, 62(203-204), pp. 205-215.

NİZAM, D. and YENAL, Z. (2020) Seed politics in Turkey: the awakening of a landrace wheat and its prospects, The Journal of Peasant Studies, 47(4), pp. 741-766.

GAJACK, O. and PELEK, S. (2019) Solidarity Economy Initiatives in Turkey: From Reciprocity to Local Development?, Review of Applied Socio-Economic Research, 18(2), pp. 30-42.

GÜNEY, O.I. and SANGÜN, L. (2021) How COVID-19 affects individuals' food consumption behaviour: a consumer survey on attitudes and habits in Turkey., British Food Journal, 123(7), pp. 2307-2320.

GÜREL, H. (2018) Food sovereignty movement in Turkey: The case of Kadikoy cooperative. (Doctoral dissertation, İstanbul Bilgi University). İstanbul Bilgi University Open Access https://openaccess.bilgi.edu.tr/items/2101ccf3-c6fb-4946-ae97-81818138bab9

AY, H.M., SÖYLEMEZ, A., and GÜNEŞ AY, N. (2023) The Economic and Social Dimension of Innovative Approaches in Sustainable Agricultural Policies and the Role of Municipalities, Turkish Journal of Agriculture-Food Science and Technology, 11(2), pp. 406-413.

KORKMAZ, C. and BALABAN, O. (2020) Sustainability of urban regeneration in Turkey: Assessing the performance of the North Ankara Urban Regeneration Project, Habitat International, 95, pp. 1021 - 1081.

LEFEBVRE, H. (1991) Critique of Everyday Life. V.1, Introduction. London: Verso.

LORENZINI, J. (2019) Food activism and citizens' democratic engagements: What can we learn from market-based political participation?, Politics and Governance, 7(4), pp.131-141.

MCMICHAEL, P. (2009) A food regime analysis of the 'world food crisis', Agriculture and human values, 26, pp. 281-295.

ÖZTÜRK, M, GÜR, F. and JONGERDEN, J.P. (2020) Food insecurity in the age of neoliberalism in Turkey and its neighbors, in: T. MAYER and M. D. ANDERSON (eds) Food insecurity: A matter of justice, sovereignty, and survival. London: Routledge, pp. 77-95.

OBA, B. and ÖZSOY, Z. (2023) Food Politics, Activism and Alternative Consumer Cooperatives. Policy Press.

ÖNCEL, H. and LEVEND, S. (2023). The effects of urban growth on natural areas: the three metropolitan areas in Türkiye, Environmental Monitoring and Assessment, 195(816).

ORKUN ORAL, İ., ÇAKICI, A., YILDIZ, F., and ALAYOUBI, M. (2023) Determinants of food price in Turkey: A Structural VAR approach, Cogent Food and Agriculture, 9(1).

SINACI ÖZFINDIK, F. (2019) Changing Characteristics of a Significant Part of the Urban Fringe in Ankara: İmrahor Valley, Journal of Ankara Studies, 7(2), pp.343-353.

SCOTT, J. (1977) The moral economy of the peasant: rebellion and subsistence in Southeast Asia. New Haven; London: Yale University Press.

SCOTT, J. (1985) Weapons of the weak: everyday forms of peasant resistance. New Haven; London: Yale University Press.

SONNINO, R. and COULSON, H. (2020) Unpacking the new urban food agenda: The changing dynamics of global governance in the urban age, Urban Studies, 58(5), pp. 1032–1049.

TANCHUM, M. (2021) Turkey's Inflation Crisis Reveals Systemic Weakness in Turkey's Food Security, The Turkey Analyst, 12/2021.

RAKOPOULOS, T. (2014) The crisis seen from below, within, and against: from solidarity economy to food distribution cooperatives in Greece, Dialectical Anthropology, 38(2), pp. 189-207.

RESLER, M. L., and HAGOLANI-ALBOV, S. E. (2021) Augmenting agroecological urbanism: the intersection of food sovereignty and food democracy, Agroecology and Sustainable Food Systems, 45(3), pp. 320-343.

RIBERIO, J. D., CİHANGER RIBEIRO, D. and DUARTE, J. S. (2020) A Legacy of Grape: A Socio-Cultural and Spatial Analysis of Ankara's Wine Production History, Journal of Ankara Studies, 8(2), pp. 215-251.

RIBERIO, J. D. (2023) Peasantry and rural resistance in the 21st century Turkey: the case of Çiftçi-Sen. (Doctoral dissertation, Middle East Technical University). OpenMETU, https://open.metu.edu.tr/handle/11511/101907

VAN DER PLOEG, J.D. (2021) The political economy of agroecology, The Journal of Peasant Studies, 48:2, pp. 274-297.

VARLI GÖRK, R. and RITTERSBERGER TILIÇ, H. (2016) An Example of a Gentrification: Unintended Consequences of an in-Situ Rehabilitation Project in Ankara, Journal of Ankara Studies, 4(1), pp. 23-43.

YÜCER, A. A. (2020) The land use in Turkey: A general assessment and affecting factors, Journal of Geoscience and Environment Protection, 8, pp.10-116.

What is left after the pandemic? Solidarity and Reciprocity from Kayambi agroecological producers during COVID-19

Paper first received: 20 December 2023; Accepted: 09 June 2024; Published in final form: 16 February 2025
https://doi.org/10.48416/ijsaf.v30i1.566

Larissa DA SILVA ARAUJO[1]

Abstract

In many places worldwide, government-imposed lockdowns during the first months of the COVID-19 pandemic resulted in harshening food insecurity for urban residents. The lockdowns had contrasting effects in the rural areas of the Cayambe canton, north of Ecuador. This article shows the different forms of solidarity and reciprocity that emerged amongst consumers and producers from Kayambi communities during the pandemic. Based on interviews and ethnographic fieldwork amongst agroecological producers in 2020 and 2021, I describe their challenges in guaranteeing food security and their strategies for generating new local markets for agroecological production. At first, like peasants in other parts of the world, producers in Cayambe faced challenges in distributing food in mainstream distribution channels, a worldwide phenomenon of food surplus accumulation (de Wit 2020). Later, a shift towards increasing agrobiodiversity and decentralizing agroecological markets became the primary strategy of Kayambis. In dialogue with Altieri and Nicholls (2020), I expand on the relevance of agroecology to reconstructing agriculture in the post-covid. I show that when capitalist structures fail to guarantee peoples' food security, other economic principles become more evident in daily life practices.

[1] Geneva Graduate Institute, Switzerland

Corresponding author: Larissa da Silva Araujo, larissa.dasilvaaraujo@graduateinstitute.ch

Biographical notes

Larissa da Silva Araujo has a Ph.D. in Anthropology and Sociology from the Geneva Graduate Institute (IHEID), Switzerland. Postdoctoral researcher in the ERC project "SWIFT – Supporting Women-led Innovation in Farming and rural Territories", Gender Centre (IHEID) Master's in human Rights and Bachelor in International Relations from the University of Brasília, Brazil.

Introduction

When everybody was confined during the COVID-19 pandemic, the primary concerns were feeding ourselves and caring for one another. Suddenly, the actions that once seemed ordinary and often taken for granted became our main priority. A dignified life and death have become central in individuals' lives worldwide. To be together with family members, eat sufficient and nutritious food, and access medicinal treatment in its varied forms regained importance over being a productive and exemplary worker.

Indeed, the COVID-19 pandemic caused high levels of unemployment and poverty, limited access to food supply chains and school nutrition programs and created food insecurity throughout the world. Consequently, a food crisis unevenly affected populations worldwide, making it evident that the food system based on global dynamics and capitalist principles needs to be replaced. Even the World Food Programme recognized and alerted to the urgency of transforming food systems (Clapp and Moseley, 2020).

In many places worldwide, government-imposed lockdowns during the first months of the COVID-19 pandemic resulted in harshening food insecurity for urban residents. The World Food Program (2020) envisioned a famine of "biblical proportions" would affect at least 30 countries.[1] If "normality" in the system previously consisted of exploiting a mass of workers to maintain levels of wealth growth, individuals began to realize that such "normality" pulled us away from ordinary everyday activities and enjoying life with our loved ones. Consequently, "a new normality" gained traction. Subsistence daily activities were more important than fulfilling a particular institution's goals or a certain company's productivity levels.

For some actors, the correct solution for the crisis in food systems was to improve their efficiency and resilience, maintaining industrial agriculture models and expanding global supply chains. This strategy was used to tackle the food crises in the 1970s, 1980s to 2000s, and 2007 to 2008. Others, however, have been advocating for the search for alternatives to the system (Altieri and Nicholls, 2020) since applying the same recipe is the reason populations worldwide could not escape the food crisis during the COVID-19 pandemic (Clapp and Moseley, 2020).

As a contribution to this debate, this article describes the dynamics before, during, and after the COVID-19 pandemic in the Ecuadorian Andes. Based on ethnographic fieldwork held between July 2019 and March 2020, January 2021 and January through March 2022, *I describe how Kayambi people*[2] *mobilized ongoing agroecological transitions as an alternative to cope with food insecurity.* This case is particularly relevant because the lockdowns had different side effects in the rural areas of the Cayambe canton, north of Ecuador. Both tendencies of maintaining industrial and agricultural models and expanding agroecological transitions happened in this territory, with fresh-cut flower plantations relying on food production from agroecological fields.

The article is organized as follows. Firstly, I establish the theoretical lenses that enabled my research project and subsequently the analysis of this case. Secondly, I briefly describe the methodological approach. Thirdly, I provide some research context, describing the socio-economic and agricultural landscape before the

[1] Available at: https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2020/apr/21/coronavirus-pandemic-will-cause-famine-of-biblical-proportions, last access on September 27th, 2023.

[2] In Ecuador, Indigenous peoples are recognized as legal subjects that can claim to constitute a nacionalidad or a pueblo. Following other authors working in Ecuador (Whitten, 2003:185; Colloredo-Mansfeld, 2009:10; Becker, 2011:3-5; Erazo, 2015:205; Radcliffe, 2015:17; Martínez Novo, 2021:36) I translate nacionalidad as nationality and pueblo as people. The Ecuadorian Constitution of 2008 recognizes 14 Indigenous nationalities in the country—Awá, Chachis, Épera, Tsa'chila, Achuar, Andoa, Cofán, Huaorani, Secoya, Shiwiar, Shuar, Siona, Zápara and Kichwa—, and also 18 peoples. The Kichwa (a definition based on the spoken language) nationality encompasses 14 pueblos that speak Kichwa with dialectic variations while having some cultural similarities. Those different forms of recognition reflect how individuals and communities identify themselves. For some individuals, on the one hand, nationality is their identity marker, like in the case of the Shuar and Achuar nationalities. On the other hand, individuals from the Kichwa nationality tend to identify themselves according to the pueblo they belong to (Chibuleo, Karanki, Kañari, Kayambi, Kisapinsha, Kitukara, Natabuela, Otavalo, Panzaleo, Pasto, Puruhá, Salasaka, Saraguro, Tomabela, Waranka).

COVID-19 pandemic when I arrived to do research fieldwork. Fourthly, I narrate what happened during the pandemic, and in the last session, I describe what remains from the transformations that occurred because of the pandemic. I conclude the article by responding to some questions that enable a conversation on a larger debate that speaks to this case but also goes beyond the context of this research.

Theoretical basis

The analysis of this case is built on alternative ways of interpreting people's economic principles, decolonial perspectives, and abolitionist agroecology. Critical perspectives about the economy challenged the reliance on orthodox economics to explain plural economies worldwide. Mauss (1950) and Polanyi (1977) were essential to developing such perspectives. Before them, anthropologists and historians were expected to focus on a grounded and empirical interpretation of so-called exotic and archaic societies. In contrast, economists could employ "rational" methods to explain a modern abstract institution known as "the market", thus retaining an important intellectual position. As Hann and Hart (2011:14) stated, these authors contributed to the endeavors of economic anthropologists on reviewing "the sociocultural dimension of the economy against the 'naturalisation' of the market system and the fiction of 'Economic Man (or Woman)' as allegedly best suited to 'human nature'" (Schulte-Tenckhoff 2015:28).

On the one hand, Marcel Mauss reviewed how exchange practices work, drawing attention to the plurality of meanings they could have. He thus conceived society as a historical project of humanity that should not be taken for granted as a pre-existent form. The reviewers of Mauss explain his main conclusion was that both attempting to create a free market for private contracts and collective structures solely based on altruism are utopian and unattainable (Hart, 2007:481). Hence, Mauss (1950) considered systems of social-prestations still endured in several societies, and advocated for an "'economic movement from below' in the form of syndicalism, cooperation, and mutual insurance" (Hart 2007, 481).

Drawing on Mauss' perspective, Polanyi explained how the plurality of societal distributions *organizes* and, in turn, *is organized* by economic institutions. Capitalist societies are not inherently capitalists, as liberal economics suggests. The process of becoming a capitalist society is as historical as other economic systems, which means that capitalist values and market rules are as important as other forms of economic organization present in other societies. The novelty brought by the capitalist system was that it produced an inversion in its process of organization: economics is what defines societal relations in capitalist societies, whereas, in other societal organizations, it is the society that defines the role of economics in individuals' lives. There is nothing inherently good or better in the capitalist system compared to other economic systems. Indeed, it is not necessarily the desired historical process of all societies, nor is it inevitable or a sign of modern and civilized societies.

Decolonial perspectives reinforce and extend this view. Decolonial scholars share a common view on how the world system, constituted as a modern world during colonial times, carries colonial relations at its core. The modern is colonial, and vice versa. Hence, the modern/colonial world system, nowadays capitalist, is constituted of other economic forms, including non-capitalist ones. According to Aníbal Quijano (2000), this is because the colonial/modern world system comprises two structural axes: work and race.

In the first axis, the author explains that the capitalist system was built during colonial times since the relations between metropoles and colonies were at the basis of the early capitalist relations. Enslavement and servitude were the colonial economic forms that made possible the oppression and subjugation of workers in the modern era. Once capitalist relations became hegemonic, these economic forms did not cease to exist. They remain, in fact, at the core of the capitalist system. For instance, in the United States, meat plants continued to function during the COVID-19 pandemic, even though 49,954 meatpacking workers had tested positive, and 254 were dead by November 2020. Not coincidently, at least 60% of the workers were Black,

Hispanic, or Asian, which indicates that the racial profile of this labor tells of an already-known history of modern slavery (Montenegro de Wit, 2021). Such an example is symptomatic of coloniality in capitalist food systems nowadays.

Moreover, according to Altieri and Nicholls (2020), agroecology became even more relevant as an alternative to reconstructing agriculture in the post-COVID context. Hence, drawing on the idea that the capitalist system is hegemonic but is not homogenous and depends on other economic forms to exist (Quijano, 2020), I argue that alternatives of living (including alternatives to hegemonic food systems) already exist, coexisting and opening breaches of the capitalist systemic hegemony. Agroecological transitions constitute one possible alternative to hegemonic food systems, but the socioeconomic changes they produce, to be fully transformative, depend on an abolitionist approach to food systems. In other words, it should aim at the liberation of racialized subjects throughout the world as they are the main exploited workforce in industrial agriculture.

Methodological approach

To build the interpretation presented in this article, I relied on the qualitative information learned during the months of ethnographic research among Kayambi people between July 2019 and March 2020, January 2021 and January through March 2022.

The collaborative research developed with Kayambi women doing agroecology (self-identifying as chakareras) enabled daily close interaction. Such interaction happened in their fields, organization meetings, exchange workshops, and markets, for which I could grasp the nuances and details of the agroecological transitions happening in the territory before, during, and after the pandemic.

During fieldwork, I lived in Cuniburo, a community in the parish of Cangahua, in southern Cayambe, at the home of the Villalba Falcón family from July 2019 to March 2020. Besides undertaking an ethnography, I initiated a collaborative project to explore the meaning of "good living" (from Kichwa sumak kawsay) for Kayambi chakareras and to develop an ethnobotanical catalog documenting the medicinal and culinary uses of their crops. I conducted 20 semi-structured interviews, divided into two phases.

In the first phase, I carried out "walking interviews" in the home gardens of chakareras with the highest biodiversity among agroecological producers from the northern and southern parishes of Cayambe. Walking interviews, a type of "go-along" interview Kusembach (2003), are particularly relevant to enable participants describe the environment while also using visual methods (Clark and Emmel 2010). While walking through the chakras (home gardens) with them, I photographed the plants and asked about the species and varieties cultivated, their uses, benefits, harvest times, and how they obtained their seeds.

Beyond facilitating conversations about biodiversity in their chakras, these walking interviews often led naturally into the second phase of the semi-structured interviews. The script for this phase was designed around questions concerning personal, family, community, and environmental aspects of the chakareras' lives. Some of those interviews (both phases) happened before the pandemic, while others were conducted in 2021 and 2022. I had designed also a focus group, specifically for the review of the ethnobotanic catalog, that was postponed to after the pandemic and occurred in September 2024. This last one is not object of inquiry in this article.

The ethnographic material as well as these interviews were the basis for identifying the Cayambe context before and during the pandemic. The continuous virtual contact and interviews during field visits during some months of the pandemic and as well as virtual and personal informal conversations after the pandemic allowed me to accompany the changes the pandemic brought to Kayambis closely. The field visits happened in a few instances in January 2021 (undertaking all the recommended sanitary measures) and January 2022,

when researchers and local collaborators were vaccinated against the COVID-19 virus. The use of social media enabled virtual communication with agroecological producers as well as the collection of the news posted in the Facebook profile of the Cayambe municipality.

Both sets of interviews were manually codified and analyzed with the help of a Kayambi symbol used as a "system of knowledge organization" known as the "Andean cross", or the chakana. The chakana represents the annual calendar, where each quadrant corresponds to a quarter of the year, with the summer and winter solstices on the vertical axis and the spring and autumn equinoxes on the horizontal axes. The first quadrant relates to the nurturing of the family, the second to the nurturing of the community, the third to the nurturing of the chakra, and the fourth to the nurturing of Pachamama, often translated as Mother Earth or nature, which they rendered in Spanish as geobiodiversity. All these quadrants are permeated by the presence the ancestry and spirituality. Therefore, the collected information was classified according to quadrant it related the most, that is individuals' definitions and its relations with the family, the community, the chakra and the geobiodiversity.

Additional to the use of the chakana for organizing the information from the semi-structured interviews in general, the ethnographic notes for this article were revised following a chronological reasoning, that is, which actions were undertaken for enabling agroecological transitions in the canton before, during and after the pandemic and which stakeholders were involved in such transitions. Being external to Cayambe – that is, having inhabited the community of Cuniburo only before the pandemic and leaving the country during the months of lockdown – interfered on my ability to directly interact with chakareras. While before I had witnessed myself the kinds of processes that agroecological transitions have enabled in the territory, during the pandemic I relied mostly on their testimonies and the materials gathered online. A research assistant from Cayambe contributed with first-hand impressions as well as with some walking interviews. However, the fact that I had established a relationship of trust with chakareras prior to the pandemic, contributing to a project that was of their interest and not only undertaking ethnography for my own research interests, enabled a consistent long-term interaction also online, specially with the Villalba Falcón family.

> *Upon my return to Ecuador in February 2021, I visited Maria Gu, a chakarera living in the Pesillo community. Unfortunately, the COVID-19 pandemic was still happening, and I canceled the plans of making a focus group with chakareras to revise the material I had collected with them for the catalog we were organizing together. However, as Maria Gu had been a close collaborator, like Hilda Villalba, we agreed to meet, complying with all the recommended safety measures: open space, masks, no close contact, and hand sanitizer. The couple is known as "the scientists" in their community due to their interest in experimenting with plants and machines. They updated me on what had happened in their community and house during the pandemic; in summary, at the beginning (March 2020), they were stuck within communities and could not leave because they feared contamination. Nobody could enter the communities either, which caused them to worry about Maria Gu's son, who was serving in the army and impeded from visiting the family. They used to spend most of their days in the house and often walked to the páramos, where they were isolated from others but in contact with wild nature. In some of these walks, they came across species of fungi and plants, rare species in their experience, that sprouted in the apparent hopelessness and lull of the pandemic. Also, they had everything they needed in her chakra to eat well without being concerned about food contamination. I laughed with them, remembering how extremely worried I was while living in Quito and Brasilia, where I immediately washed all food packages upon returning from the supermarket. They proudly shared they had obtained a transport permit to travel to another canton at the beginning of the pandemic. The permit allowed them to provide grains and vegetables to their family members and neighbors in peri-urban neighborhoods in Quito. "In solidarity", they said. They also shared food with neighbors in the community, but in their view, city dwellers were the most disadvantaged.*

In this sense, ethnographic work proved to be a pertinent methodology for closely reviewing a context already altered by a previous agricultural change - the arrival and establishment of agroecological transitions in the territory. As the first impact of the pandemic was indeed a negative one (as I will show in the next sessions), undertaking ethnographic work allowed me to gain a detailed and nuanced view of what emerged as a change (different from the already ongoing changes) beyond such negative impacts and the possibilities

of agroecological transition as pertinent alternatives for hegemonic food systems.

Moreover, as this story shows, field visits during and after the pandemic were also crucial to capture and understand the changes that both the pandemic brought to the livelihoods and projects of chakareras as well as how the ongoing agroecological transitions also enabled navigating the challenges posed by the pandemic.

Research context

Cayambe is a canton located in the northern part of the Ecuadorian Andes, in the Pichincha province. It is constituted of different ecological levels, from 2,400 meters above sea level in the valley of the Pisque River to 5,400 meters above sea level on the imposing and icy Cayambe volcano. Cayambe is also the historical scene of agrarian conflicts in Ecuador, where the Ecuadorian Indigenous movement was born with the organization Federación Ecuatoriana de Índios (Ecuadorian Federation of Indians - FEI). Women like Dolores Cacuango and Transito Amaguaña[3] – Kayambi women whose biographies are enmeshed with the Indigenous struggle in the country – are the example and pride of most of the inhabitants who consider themselves Kayambi. The Kayambi territory, according to CPK estimates, is already made up of the territories of 170 communities that occupy areas in the cantons of Cayambe and Pedro Moncayo (Pichincha province), Otavalo and Ibarra (Imbabura province) and Chaco (Napo province).

The estimated population living in the Kayambi territory is 148,813, according to the Confederation of Kayambi People (CPK) and the Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador (CONAIE).[4] Most of the inhabitants are engaged in agricultural production, with emphasis on the production of flowers for export, milk and onion production for sale in the national market, and various foods – such as corn, potatoes, barley, wheat, oats and other foods – for self-consumption and sale at local fairs. The data regarding the population of the Kayambi territory remains incomplete due to its span across multiple cantons. The Cayambe municipality estimates that, in 2019, the canton population totaled 105,781 individuals, distributed in rural (50.6%) and urban (49.4%) areas (GADIP Cayambe 2020). According to the official census in 2010, 42.6% of the population was active in the primary sector in agricultural activities, while 32.34% was in the tertiary sector (which includes daily agricultural services for flower plantations, for instance). The secondary sector accounts for 14.39% of the population; 8.49% do not declare their activities, and 2.17% are classified as "new workers".

Around the 2000s, according to Hilda Villalba, the first women started to recover and build agroecological chakras.[5] Later, they would form groups of agroecological producers who dedicated themselves to the chakra biodiversity, which incorporated food from both the Andean diet and non-native vegetables. According to data from the municipality, based on the 2010 census, 14.5% of the productive area of Cayambe is dedicated to the production of short-cycle and fruit crops, such as onions, maize, wheat, barley, potatoes, quinoa, strawberries, beans, broccoli, chochos, peas, avocado, lemons, tree tomatoes, among others (GADIP Cayambe, 2015: 154). More individuals joined agroecological production to take advantage of this biodiverse farming

[3] Biographies of FEI founders and leaders attest they were also responsible for founding the sindicatos (peasant unions) and leading Indigenous uprisings in Cayambe (Becker, 2008). Transito Amaguaña worked in the north of Cayambe while Dolores Cacuango worked in the south of the canton.

[4] According to Instituto Nacional de Estadísticas y Censos (National Institute of Statistics and Censuses) in the 8th National Census in Ecuador (2022), the population that self-identified as Indigenous in the Cayambe canton is 37.339 individuals, equivalent to 35.5% of the cantonal population. However, Indigenous organizations consider the census to underestimate the size of the indigenous population in the country, as identifying with the category Indigenous still carries the negative connotation that "índios" had. As a colonial concept, índio (Indian) is laden with derogatory meanings: being an illiterate (in Spanish education), a traditional person that works the land and lives in a rural area, the servant of a landlord (a private organization or the state), etc. Being recognized as Indigenous, not as índio, is still a fight for Indigenous peoples.

[5] Generally, it is the small plot of land an Indigenous family cultivates for their subsistence, known in Western terms as a "garden." Furthermore, it is the house space where the Kayambi and other Andean peoples undertake productive and reproductive agricultural, medicinal, and spiritual activities. The self-identification "chakarera" relates to chakra, meaning "the one who takes care of the chakra".

tradition. In 2019, there were 13 identified agroecological groups, with about 160 qualified producers with agroecological cards and nearly 500 qualified producers in the initial stage of the agroecological transition.[6] In addition, 222 individuals organized in the Movimiento Cantonal de Mujeres (Cantonal Women's Movement – MCM hereafter), an association dedicated to women's organization that also promotes agroecological transitions in the canton. They produce for their families' consumption and sell at the agroecological fairs. The agroecological market used to take place in Cayambe city, in the central parks of parishes, and on roadsides.

Looking at the landscape of Cayambe from the highest altitudes, however, one can see an enormous number of greenhouses occupying large tracts of land. In 2015, according to data from the municipality, the canton had an area of 1,350km², of which 49.2% had distinct purposes: environmental conservation, anthropic use, watercourses, or unproductive land. Large plots of over 25 hectares account for 4% of the land and are used to produce roses and livestock farming. Rose production occupies mainly the plains of volcanic deposits. Thus, valley lands that formerly belonged to the colonial haciendas benefited from favorable soil for production and had access to water streams. Nowadays, such lands belong to flower plantations and cattle ranches (GADIP Cayambe, 2015: 163).

The rose production in Ecuador started in 1984, when the first companies established greenhouses in Cayambe and Tabacundo cantons. It spread to other provinces during the 90s, but the most extensive plantations are still in this region. Flowers are the country's second-largest agricultural export commodity, and their "export volume has been converted into the agricultural product with the greatest increase in production in the last decade" (Yagual et al., 2018). An international commodity, these flowers hold the sixth place among Ecuadorian export products (equivalent to US$937 million, 3.84% of the national exports) in 2021.[7]

Located south of the Cayambe canton, Cangahua parish is home to the Cayambe Coca National Park. This ecological reserve protects one of the main water supplies in the country.[8] Cangahua parish accounts for 42 communities and is inhabited by 16,231 individuals, in 5,533 homes (INEC 2010), in an area of 33,235 hectares (GAD Cangahua 2014, 135). Compared to other Cayambe parishes, Cangahua's population has higher levels of impoverishment, mainly due to its agrarian structure. Nowadays, plain and fertile lands belong to foreign landowners who use them mainly for flower plantations, which total eleven companies in this parish. On the way to Villalba-Falcón's house in Cuniburo, we can see the two flower plantations, Falconfarms Ecuador S.A. and Rosaprima Cia Ltda. They are the country's second and third biggest rose companies. Falconfarms has an annual profit of $35.7 million and the same amount in assets. Rosaprima has around 1,200 employees and has an annual profit of $28.2 million and $28.8 million in assets. Community inhabitants remain at the margins of these flower plantations, often owning pending small plots of land with a fragile soil structure (Gualavisi, 2016). In those properties, they reproduce a variety of crops for subsistence and the local markets in their chakras. In the communities found in higher altitudes, some comuneros invest in the production of onions for the national market.

In the next session, I will present what changed from a context in which agro-ecological transformations were already in place. Both agroecological groups and fresh-cut flower plantations expanded their activities during

[6] To ensure that producers comply with requirements to identify themselves as agroecological and to assure consumers of agroecological product quality, a Participatory Guarantee System (SPG) of certification was put in place in 2018. The SPG technical and ethical committees are responsible for undertaking the monitoring process and the data analysis, respectively. The technical committee comprises the chakareras and technical members of the municipality. At the same time, the ethical committee also integrates external members of an institution that works as a neutral body for evaluating the stages of the agroecological transition of chakras. Chakareras receive other inspectors in their houses to collect the data in a sort of peer-review process. Still, this data is analyzed externally through a "sustainability of complex socio-environmental systems framework" called MESMIS (López-Ridaura, 2002) Through MESMIS, each producer receives a score, which informs consumers whether the producers are "fully agroecological", "in transition to agroecology", or in the "initial stage" (López Toaquisa, 2019).

[7] Available at https://oec.world/en/profile/country/ecu?depthSelector1=HS4Depth&tradeScaleSelector1=tradeScale0&yearSelector1=2021, last access on September 27th, 2023.

[8] Available at https://www.ambiente.gob.ec/parque-nacional-cayambe-coca/, last access on September 27th, 2023.

the pandemic. However, the capacity of fresh-cut flower plantations to continue fully paradoxically depended on the re-localization of food systems in the indigenous communities.

What happened during the pandemic?

Temporary increase on food insecurity

In the first weeks following the sanitary measures implemented in Ecuador , Kayambi people living in indigenous communities had difficulties accessing different food products. With the entrance and exit of communities more restricted, it became more difficult for inhabitants whose diet depended on food bought daily. That was especially true for those living in the highlands, physically accessing mainstream food channels (food stores and wholesale marketplace). Elders, particularly those already in a vulnerable situation regarding food security, became a target public for food distribution initiatives that emerged within communities and counted on the municipality's leadership.

Besides, fresh-cut flower plantation laborers also faced difficulty accessing food because their income was reduced considerably during the confinement. Working with a contract of limited duration, those laborers do not have work stability. Most laborers are recruited for specific time frames (in seasons of high demand), with daily or weekly payments, and often do extra hours to increase their salary. Some authors (Korovkin, 2003; Friedemann-Sánchez, 2009; Tutillo, 2010; Gualavisi, 2016) describe in detail this labor's working contracts and conditions largely reliant on female work. Unable to leave their houses to work on the flower plantations because of the sanitary measures, their income was not enough to guarantee food purchases. Additionally, considering women have been the main ones responsible for households' food security and, paradoxically, are the ones most affected by food insecurity worldwide (Broussard, 2019), a situation that is also replicated in Indigenous communities in Ecuador (Kuhnlein, 2017), the inability to access food markets and reduced income increased food insecurity among the Kayambi people.

Surplus accumulation

While consumers had struggled to reach mainstream food markets, producers also had difficulty releasing their products. Onion producers in the highlands had little transport available, and even when it was the case, they were impeded from crossing province boundaries due to sanitary restrictions. Milk producers faced an even more serious challenge, as their production should be released daily. Agroecological producers who normally used to sell their products at farmers' markets on certain days of the week and in urban settings encountered the same restrictions. The less connection with public authorities, the fewer possibilities one had to release their production.

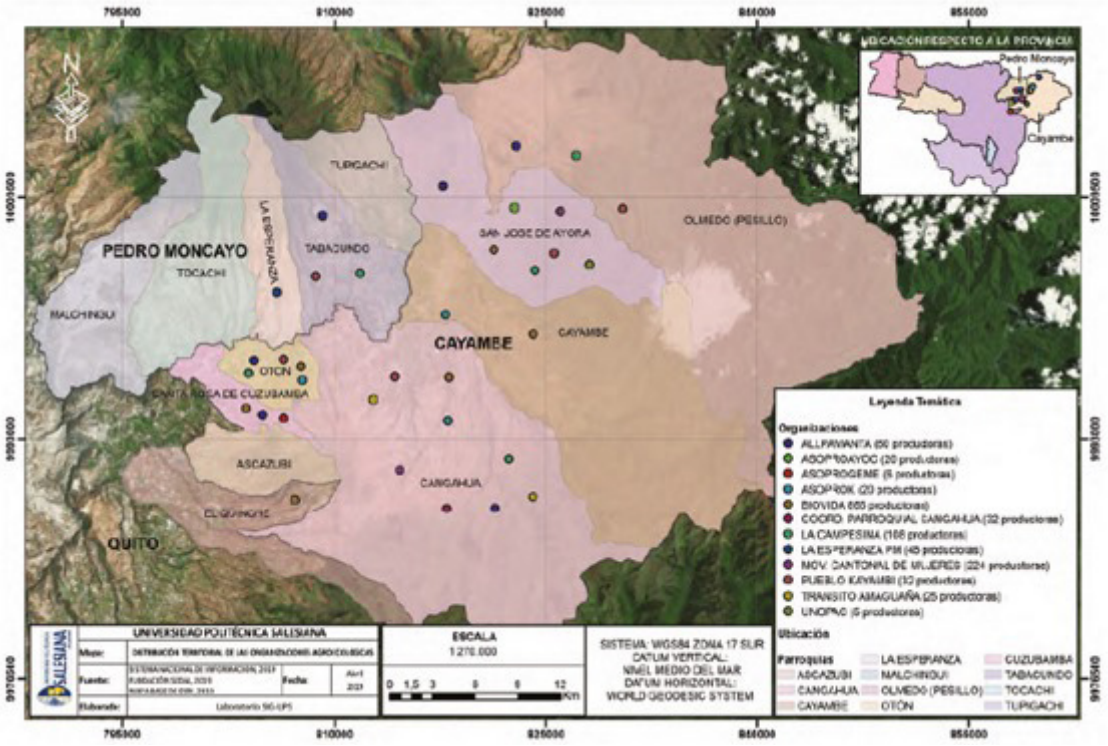
However, I recall that food supermarkets were fully functioning while I was in confinement in Quito in March 2020. Angus Lyall et al. (2021) show how the national government eased curfews and other sanitary restrictions for the country's three most prominent food companies while maintaining strict sanitary restrictions in the distribution channels of the agroecological producers. Therefore, while consumers and producers have not yet found creative solutions for coping with the sanitary restrictions and keeping their market interactions outside the hegemonic food system, there was a concentration of wealth in the hands of large food companies. In this case, the worldwide food surplus accumulation trend (Montenegro de Wit, 2021) was also confirmed.

Decentralization of the community market

This map shows where agroecological producers from fourteen different agroecological organizations were allowed to place their food markets in the Cayambe territory before the COVID-19 pandemic. Although

the public ordinance[9] allowed them to set up their food markets in stable public locations, such as parking lots, parks, and squares, in 2019, chakareras considered the market infrastructure unsatisfactory. They had received some subsidies from partner institutions (such as NGOs, foundations, and the municipality) to buy frame tents, tables, and other materials for their food markets, but a place for storing and cleaning products, for instance, was unavailable. From their viewpoint, such temporary structures were still insufficient to assert their market relevance before consumers.

Figure 1 Agroecological groups in the territory of the Kayambi People. (Requelme et al., 2019:24)



With the COVID-19 pandemic, the infrastructure of these food markets changed, and decentralization ensued. Reviewing sanitization became urgent, and the temporary structures of the markets had to be improved to ensure the health and safety of producers and consumers. At first, the municipality tried to control the agroecological food markets. They concentrated sellers in one ample space in the northern part of Cayambe town, with "safe distance" between stands, a sanitizing cabinet placed at the entrance to sanitize everyone who walked in, and producers were placed a few meters away from consumers.

As a result, the agroecological food markets began to lose their role as places for the community, where producers and consumers would get together, eat together, exchange, and interact. Its commercial function overshadowed its relational aspect, which became central in the extraordinary context. Hence, in the first moment, the purpose of the agroecological food markets was solely to provide an environment where trade transactions could happen without the risk of virus contamination.

Although chakareras usually consider contamination arguments with prudence, in this context, they took advantage of public discourses around it to expand agroecology in the territory. Marta Tutillo argues that "without facing flower plantations in the canton, one that says agroecological products were freed from agrochemicals is telling 'lyrism', because the soil, the water, and the air are already polluted" (personal

[9] The "Ordinance for the use of public spaces for the commercialization of agroecological products in the municipality of Cayambe" was approved in 2018. Since then, agroecological producers can obtain legal authorization to commercialize their products in public spaces and other aspects of certification became regulated in the territory.

conversation, September 2019). Following this reasoning, chakareras consider their food "healthy" because it has less agrochemicals, and also because they are produced in an environment where multiple beings co-exist in harmony. They had the same approach regarding the virus, and tried to develop natural medicines that would slow down the action of the virus, depending on its interaction with the body. They did not, however, deny the relevance of preventive measures to impede the spread of the virus, especially because they knew the local health system would not be able to assist a great number of infected patients. Considering that, it was necessary to disperse human contact, and the best way of doing it was decentralizing their markets and the interactions within them.

Figure 2 Agroecological food market in Cayambe, 2020. Screenshot of GADIP Cayambe Facebook, 2020.

Then, what ensued was a decentralization of agroecological food markets, which began to emerge within communities, finding a place in communal houses or school patios. Experienced chakareras were responsible for integrating new participants and organizing a rotation system among them to ensure equitable and secure market access for producers and consumers. Their inspiring example instilled a renewed interest in agroecology within the communities, a process that occurred in similar fashion in other contexts during the COVID-19 pandemic (Levidow, Sansolo and Schiavinatto, 2022). Chakareras recounted that their neighbors showed increased enthusiasm for cultivating vegetables, resulting in a surge in demand for seedlings. Prior to the pandemic, local NGOs and the municipality were the primary sources of seedling donations which probably generated patterns of paradoxical dependent autonomy from these institutions (Lind 2005). During the crisis, however, chakareras had to assume the responsibility for seedling growth and reproduction to ensure the sustainability of their chakras and meet the growing local demand for their produce. A collaboration between the municipal and provincial governments and the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock[10] provided them with some fertilizers and seedlings. Nevertheless, the budget initially allocated for agroecology was redirected to funding biosecurity measures to prevent the spread of COVID-19.

New incomers, initially, tend to be enthusiastic about producing agroecologically since the local ordinance guarantees property tax exemption for producers who achieve certain stages of transition to agroecology. The tax exemption is granted to chakras well evaluated in the cantonal Participatory Guarantee System (Sistema Participativo de Garantía – SPG). However, it is not yet known what advantages this brings to agroecological producers since it is necessary to have a property deed to benefit from the exemption. If

[10] Information from the social networks of GADIP Cayambe. Available at https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=942358612876342, accessed on August 25, 2020.

Cayambe follows the same trend as the rest of the country,[11] and considering that women tenure only 25% of agricultural properties in Ecuador, it is unlikely that they are benefiting from the acquired right.

Breaking of resistance to adopting agroecology.

Before the pandemic, agroecological producers and activists were often criticized for romanticizing food systems' transformation. In Cayambe, during small-scale producers' meeting I encountered arguments against agroecology because it was seen as an elitist form of production, that targeted a "market niche". Besides, since the income resulting from sales of agroecological food was not extraordinary, local producers tended to be more resistant to engaging in agroecological transitions.

Despite that, before and during the COVID-19 pandemic, chakareras received expansion proposals in two formats (expansion at the field level and by incorporating more producers) and each agroecological group engaged with the proposals differently. Before the pandemic, I once participated in a meeting between them and council members of the cantonal legislative house, who offered to facilitate expansion of agroecological initiatives by incorporating two types of consumers into their portfolio. The first type would be online users that could buy "on-demand" baskets via an online application to be developed by a partner start-up. The consumer should use the online application to choose the products they wanted, and a basket should then be prepared with products of different chakareras and delivered to them.

Such a "community-supported agriculture" (CSA) model has been widespread as an alternative that makes food systems local (Desmarais, Claeys and Trauger, 2017). Chakareras had already been involved in CSA with other partners (universities and restaurants) when they received this first proposal. Despite being a supply-based scheme, as the baskets should be made according to the availability of products and would not necessarily imply a yield increase, chakareras did not receive this proposal well. The reason was that it would include a faceless intermediary they thought would represent an employer. They had higher regard for their autonomy and direct relationship with the consumer than for increasing their sales.

Also, before the pandemic, the municipality invited them to engage in another CSA proposal: to produce food to feed workers at flower plantations. This second type of consumer would therefore be the plantation farms, that would buy the chakarera's produce daily to provide daily meals for their workers. The intention was to massify local production via consumption demand, reducing transportation costs for both the chakareras and the plantations farms. Instead of producing only for self-consumption and selling at the agroecological food markets, chakareras would have a guaranteed market for their products.

Hilda Villalba recounted that after much deliberation, they rejected the proposal for several reasons. Firstly, it would pressure them to increase their production, requiring more labor, which, intensified, could result in physical strain. Secondly, to increase production, they would require water, land, and other inputs that they did not have access to because, ironically, they were concentrated in the flower plantations in question. Thirdly, without means for expanding, they would have to intensify their practices, changing their production relations not only quantitatively (pursuing more yields per hectare) but also qualitatively (imposing temporalities of external demand on the rhythms of the chakra). Finally, although it could promote a local change in food systems, it would be at the expense of exploiting chakareras and their chakras.

During the pandemic, they were proposed the same idea, and this time they decided to accept it, for two reasons: there was an increment on food insecurity in the region and also because new producers were joining the movement. Such a proposal was another form of massifying agroecology by opening markets to an increased pool of producers. Instead of intensifying agroecology, it would be extending and multiplying it.

[11] According to the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) statistics on Gender and Land Rights, in the 2000 census, 25% of land ownership was under the name of women. Available at http://www.fao.org/gender-landrights-database/data-map/statistics/en/, accessed on August 25, 2020.

In fact, that is one of their main concerns at present: ensuring their family would have enough land to follow the same pathway, staying in the countryside instead of facing hardship with underpaid urban jobs. Reversing migration and enhancing the lives of rural families through agroecology were some of their political bets. In addition to access to land, another factor that worried the chakareras was that more producers joined the movement without becoming politically engaged. Being convinced of the agroecology advantages is not evidence of political engagement, since many smallholders adopt agroecology envisaging mainly monetary gains.

Those are ways of massifying agroecology through "out-scaling" – when a growing number of social groups across a territory join in on horizontal alliances, promoting changes in the practices of food production, distribution and consumption (López-García, 2020). A social movement is strengthened when such horizontal alliances are built not solely due to market incentives but because individuals become politically convinced of the need to transform agriculture, food systems, and beyond. These processes were reinforced during the COVID-19 pandemic in Cayambe when more people joined the movement after experiencing the hardships of the food crisis.

In addition to the conjunctural pressure, agroecology became a more realistic project for formerly resistant peasants because chakareras work became exemplary. Their example of solidarity towards community residents facing food insecurity raised questions about the presupposition that agroecological initiatives are inherently classicist and elitist. Besides, chakareras became the very source of seeds (again, the lack of access to formal seed markets led producers to search for alternative sources) and also their socio-economic and agro-ecological knowledge became recognized as an expertise. Hence, serving as an example, chakareras promoted a political awareness about the pragmatic possibilities for producers turning into agroecological transitions and to consumers about the benefits of short-circuits in food systems.

Solidarity with peri urban residents

In addition to addressing food insecurity within communities, Kayambis living in the countryside also provided for peri urban residents in the province of Pichincha. Besides sharing their grains and tubers with their Indigenous individuals living in communities in the outskirts of cities like Quito and Ibarra, chakareras also engaged on preparing food baskets with products from several chakras to be also distributed among Indigenous city dwellers. As Maria Gu recounted, because her son could not enter the community due to sanitary restrictions, her family decided to provide not only for him, but also for other neighbors they identified were facing difficulty to access food. Such connection between the Indigenous communities in the countryside and the city centers (Colloredo-Mansfeld, 1999) already existed prior to the pandemic, and the solidary practices were shown also in other extraordinary events, such as the national strike that happened in October 2019 (Araujo and Da Silva, 2022). When the pandemic emerged, Kayambis strived to active their network connections, reciprocating the solidarity Indigenous communities have demonstrated in previous moments.

Exchange and trueque amongst regions

Chakareras recounted that seed and produce exchange continue to happen amongst agroecological producers during the pandemic and thanks to that they could overcome their own challenges on reproducing a biodiverse chakra. Such a practice, locally called *trueque*,[12] has historical roots and is one manifestation of the reciprocity principle that constitutes Kayambi people economic values.

[12] Emilia Ferraro (2011) similarly identifies that this form of barter exists between the exchange forms observed in "markets" and "gifting". Furthermore, she explains, "trueque entails ideas, values, and visions of the transacting 'other' and of 'oneself', as well as different perceptions of the economic process itself".

In addition to solidarity between comuneros, reciprocity between producers within and outside the Andean region became more evident as a relevant source for agricultural alternative systems. Hilda Villalba recounted that, under the leadership of the national Indigenous organization (CONAIE), regional organizations in the Andes and the Amazon (Ecuarunari and CONFENIAE respectively) collaborated to promote trueques between communities.

Considering the ecological microverticality[13] characteristic of the Andes and the complementarity between different ecological floors in Ecuador (Murra, 2013), food production varies across regions. Therefore, species and varieties mainly produced in the Andes became available for Amazonian communities and vice-versa, guaranteeing not only food security for consumers but reinforcing Indigenous autonomy and management of peoples' food sovereignty.

Expantion of agricultural frontier

Figure 3 Food baskets for Quito dwellers, April 2020.

Photo by Maria Guatemal

When I returned to Cayambe at the beginning of 2022, I visited the community of Cochapamba, located in the high parts of the canton. Cochapamba has lower temperatures than most communities, and the agroecological conditions only allow for a few varieties of crop production. There, I could observe the incredible expansion of greenhouses into the communities, as more comuneros begin to invest in flower production on their properties. Even a small plot of land of 1-ha has been sufficient for such an enterprise, and because of that, it became attractive during the COVID-19 pandemic. Former daily workers in flower plantations acquired the technical knowledge to produce roses and began to use it for their benefit. Thomas Aules, an inhabitant of Cochapamba, explained that each hectare would require an investment of around $10,000.

The expansion of micro flower farms within the communities' frontiers was already happening before the pandemic, but accelerated during it. Since the land purchase seems less interesting to flower plantations – since communities had imposed a limitation to their expansion – their owners started to incentivize the expansion of the businesses within communities through contract farming. Former laborers of those plantations, benefiting from the technical knowledge acquired during their work, began to install greenhouses in their chakras and establish contracts with flower plantations to sell them the finished commodity. In this sense, despite being advertised as a participatory alternative for smallholders to engage in large scale business, the cooptation of community dwellers through contract farming has been denounced by chakareras as a renewed form of land grabbing happening in the Kayambi territory.

What continues after the COVID-19 pandemic?

Even before the COVID-19 pandemic was controlled with the vaccination in mass, the "old" normality related to food systems seem to return. Even amidst the still critical scenarios of new waves of contamination with new variants of the virus, the informal sector in the cities was fully working already. Food crises in

[13] The subsistence apparatus had a concentric structure: a "micro-vertical" organization at the center, a system of generalized exchange connecting the center with ecologically complementary zones of moderately distant chiefdoms, and a long-distance organization to attain exotic good from beyond the working radius of people with agricultural commitments (Salomon, 1986:13).

other contexts have also generated alternatives. On the one hand, during the Argentinian crisis in 2001, for instance, the *comedores comunitarios* (community kitchens) were an alternative that city dwellers found to come together, and fight hunger caused by hyperinflation. Some of these efforts evolved into other forms of work collectivization, while others were temporary measures that only lasted for the duration of the crisis. On the other hand, Cuba had become an example in the agroecological literature, which developed peasant-to-peasant methods for tackling food crisis after the end of the USSR and the beginning of the "special period", when the country faced US blockades for importing food and agricultural inputs (Mier Y Terán Giménez Cacho et al., 2018). In this view, some questions emerge: did the agroecological transitions that have been happening in Cayambe since the beginning of the 2010s transform after the COVID-19 pandemic? If so, how? From the changes that happened during the pandemic, which of them resisted the reinstallation of the hegemonic food regimes? Are those changes enduring?

The work the Kayambi People Confederation started doing towards mitigating food insecurity continues to be in their agenda: their workshops for forming teachers to work with families on the revalorization of local varieties and native recipes are still being offered as a regular activity. Teachers from kindergartens continue to have access to an intercultural methodology developed specifically to address food insecurity and malnutrition in the territory.

During the pandemic, individual consumption of agroecological products increased within communities. The proximity of community markets to comuneros' houses and seeing the sellers as their neighbors resulted in consumers and producers fostering closer relationships, to the point that, community markets still endured when I returned to Cayambe in 2022. The municipality also incentivized CSA, but this time as intermediaries between consumers and chakareras. These out-scaling initiatives seem to hold after the pandemic, which leads to other questions to draw longitudinal comparisons and contribute to debates on the *longue durée* of agroecological transitions.

Meanwhile, the decentralization of the agroecological markets was sustained by the municipal government after the agroecological groups pressured it. The markets that existed prior to the pandemic were reinstalled, expanded and more consolidated. Hence, agroecological markets are happening more times throughout the week and the whole weekend, which opened more opportunity for old and new incomers to experiment with different forms of marketing their produce.

Consequently, more producers adhered to the agroecological groups – both the Women's Cantonal Movement and the Producers Council reported an increase on their membership – generating the need for the political formation of new incomers about the role of a political agroecology. More than an economic opportunity, agroecology is being consolidated in the territory as an alternative to hegemonic food systems. Adopting agroecology means, in this territory, working for the recuperation of a biodiverse chakra as well as the valorization of local species and native recipes. Moreover, it is also the entry point for remembering and recovering ancestral practices and knowledges related to taking care of nature. In this view, the agroecological groups, with the support of local and national NGOs and the municipal government, began to offer a series of workshops for new incomers to acquire practical and theoretical knowledge about agroecology so their economic engagement with agroecology was also coupled with their politicization about it.

Even though chakareras have inspired out-scaling agroecology in Cayambe by being *exemplary* and engaged in market decentralization for "local agroeconomical dynamization" (López-García et al. 2020), they remain critical of the sudden increase in producers joining the agroecological groups, mainly because the SPG requires a level of participation and engagement with the movement that demands commitment. As mentioned, they remain skeptical of participatory methods that are lauded as a transformative for out-scaling agroecology.

Regarded not only as practice, science, and social movement but as a framework that is transdisciplinary,

participatory, and action-oriented (Mendez et al., 2015), agroecology enters a fourth phase. According to this perspective, scholars have warned that participatory-oriented research and actions in agroecology should encompass a shared interest between research participants, a belief in the power of collective action, a commitment to participation, the practice of humbleness, and the establishment of trust and responsibility. Furthermore, to sustain it for extended periods, time and resources are required, as well as the facilitation of processes with multiple actors. Finally, development organizations and public institutions that do not fully integrate such a transdisciplinary approach to agroecology often pose challenges to a bottom-up out-scaling approach (Méndez et al., 2017).

Therefore, the increased number of producers joining agroecological groups generates numerous complications. More producers doing agroecology leads to an out-scaling through the increased supply. However, finding market innovations, such as the CSA initiatives that emerged during the pandemic, seems to be a temporary solution to solve the market competition problem. Additionally, ensuring quality through the SPG process requires time and resources for the training of new inspectors and of new incomers to fulfill the technical criteria necessary to receive their "stage" recognition (such as building a post-harvest space or space for raising animals). In short, nobody can become agroecological producer overnight.

Indeed, even the most experienced chakareras sometimes complain they do not have enough to bring to the market, when their yields are insufficient, on a particular week, to justify paying transportation costs. Reaching an optimal stage is rare, and becoming "fully agroecological", where one can work in a fully developed chakra, is difficult to attain. It is challenging to reach the point where the relation between crop productivity, chakra labor uses, and market responsibilities does not represent a feeling of self-exploitation. This type of expertise is developed with time, and with understanding nature's multi-temporalities.

Moreover, even though the municipality supports them in developing agroecological production technically, chakareras still do not have a market incentive that would allow them to create, maintain and sustain their productive initiatives. Apart from the ordinance, no other public policy to support agroecology is concretized into a bonus or credit program, for instance. There are plans to implement a redistributive policy, in which taxes are collected from the flower plantations and allocated to agroecological production, but this has not yet materialized. During COVID-19 pandemic, they had to rely on the growth of their seedlings for reproduction, for instance. So, if they do not have sufficient market incentives for agroecology, why do they continue to do it?

I argue that they initiate their engagement with agroecology in their houses, with domestic needs in mind, more than incentivized by external circumstances. Since they are proposing these alternatives in their houses, it can completely reshape their lives. Their engagement is embedded in the identification process with this political subjectivity. In addition to producing agroecologically, they identify a reconnection with their memories, with the ways previous generations made it possible to raise their families and endure oppression through taking care of the chakra, the community, and the Pachamama and vice-versa.

Chakareras are thus politically convinced of agroecology. Their example is based on relationality and affection for the body, the land and the territory, and their agroecological engagement stems from such values. It is not an approach toward the external consumer – obviously, they do respond to those consumers who decide to integrate a "value chain" – but an approach toward themselves first. For those reasons, chakareras are skeptical of out-scaling without a politicization process, where new incomers would do not understand and share a collective awareness of agroecology as a political project for transforming capitalist, racist, colonial, and patriarchal structures.

The process of politicizing agroecology in Cayambe is unique because it is a novel one in Ecuador. However, it is situated in a broader political conjuncture, which Indigenous and other social movements have fostered

in the country since the beginning of the 2000s. The incorporation of sumak kawsay and the Rights of Nature into the national normativity enabled Indigenous peoples to articulate discourses of autonomy and sovereignty into concrete practices of interculturality and plurinationality, such as intercultural education, Indigenous justice, and economic pluralism, among others yet to be documented.

According to Richard Intriago et al. (2017) the principle of *sumak kawsay*[14] worked as a framework for the articulation of the Agroecological Collective of Ecuador, formed in 2007, and paved the way for a new law about agroecology in the country in 2012, the Organic Law about the Food Sovereignty Regime (*Ley Orgánica del Régimen de Soberanía Alimentaria*). Similarly, other authors (Giunta, 2014; McKay, Nehring and Walsh-Dilley, 2014; Peña, 2017) have reported that the institutionalization of food sovereignty, starting in the Plurinational and Intercultural Conference on Sovereignty (*Conferencia Plurinacional e Intercultural para la Soberanía*) from 2009 to 2012, has been permeated by essential contributions from various sectors of the Indigenous movement in the country. According to them, sumak kawsay has been at the base of the discussion about food sovereignty in the country.

Despite being regarded as a top-down approach, this method of scaling up agroecology, which aims to build political leverage and agency while promoting the institutionalization of experiences and the development of public policies (López-García 2020), seems to be appropriated by chakareras in their day-to-day discourses about agroecology. It allows them to define their political subjectivity as embedded in a larger framework of national politics. In this sense, despite being a localized alternative, the experience of chakareras regarding agroecological transitions speaks to more extensive changes in the country, communicating with cross-country experiences. That is what chakareras do in their daily lives, exchange with other groups at the community, parish, and cantonal levels, and with other agroecological collectives and experiences around the country. They share and expose what happens in their houses, thus connecting, comparing, differentiating, and identifying with others pursuing similar political goals.

While Ferguson et al. (2019) interpret such politicization as a complementary and interwoven merge of up-scaling and out-scaling approaches, other authors construe it as the formation of a "political agroecology" (Rivera-Ferre, 2018; González De Molina and Lopez-Garcia, 2021; Levidow, Sansolo and Schiavinatto, 2022). Adding to these views, I draw attention to the scale of agroecology in chakareras' perspectives, which goes from corporal (eating healthy) to territorial (healing the nature).

For these reasons, the dynamics between community dwellers with the expansion of the agricultural frontier through contract farming are worth investigating. The extent and impact of such expansion still needs to be assessed more thoroughly, for which mixed methods research would be an important contribution. In some instances, farmers abandoned the flower business after the pandemic because the capital return was insufficient to sustain the fields.

Conclusion

In the Ecuadorian Andes, as in other parts of the world, the production of global commodities stopped during the COVID-19 pandemic. Producing roses in the middle of a global health crisis has become unimportant. Since workers could not go to the flower plantations, their source of income became scarce. In the search for an economic alternative, they found that a small production in the backyard was one solution to prevent starvation in the rural areas and the peripheries of cities.

Contrasting agro-ecological models emerged more consistently during the COVID-19 pandemic. On the

[14] Sumak kawsay is an expression from the Kichwa language and is commonly translated to "buen vivir" in Spanish and "good living" in English It may have different meanings, primarily "life in plenitude" (Macas 2010) or "harmonious life" (Dávalos 2011, Viteri et al. 1992). In 2008, sumak kawsay was introduced as one of the basic principles of the new Ecuadorian Constitution to describe development policies.

one hand, COVID-19 pandemic exposed frauds and flaws of the current global agri-food system. In different contexts, for instance, it was possible to observe the concentration of market power in a small number of large agribusiness corporations. In Cayambe, I observed agrarian frontiers expansion within Indigenous communities – a pattern to which Tania Li (2014) had brought attention before the pandemic. According to decolonial perspectives, the modern/colonial capitalist system depends on racialized forms of labor. Due to these characteristics, the dominant agrifood system exacerbated racialized vulnerabilities (Montenegro de Wit, 2021).

On the other hand, the pandemic also highlighted positive dynamics, within and at the margins of the global agrifood system, the urgency of changing extractive agriculture, and the possibility of expanding agroecology through smallholding farming. In Ecuador Angus Lyall et al. (2021) identified trends in urban groups and collectives that, associated with agroecological producers, provided healthy and affordable food to low-income neighborhoods, which resulted in "spatial and social 're-localization' practices that challenge the hegemony of conventional food circuits." In this context, Kayambi chakareras managed to gain social leverage and visibility and expand agroecology at the local level.

Additionally, different forms of solidarity and reciprocity emerged during the pandemic amongst consumers and producers from Kayambi communities. Despite being apparently marginal, the principles of care,[15] solidarity, complementarity, and reciprocity are underlying the lives of individuals from several different societies to different degrees. During the pandemic of COVID-19, the necessity of care work for sustaining life worldwide, for instance, became even more evident. In this thesis, I describe how the Kayambi people chose to emphasize those principles in their political projects.

The main response to transforming food systems was to re-localize food production, distribution, and consumption, and turn it into agricultural alternatives such as agroecology. Agroecology, which had previously been regarded as a return to "backward agriculture", turned out to be more relevant as a source of life alternatives. However, agroecology is not a new solution. Like other life alternatives, it relies on economic values that scholars have studied for a long time. It relies on some market structures, on the local dynamics more than global ones, on solidarity among producers and between producers and consumers, on strengthening connections among regional intermediaries, and on reciprocity among humans and other-beings and other-than-beings. Moreover, agroecology as practiced by chakareras is based on various notions and practices of care, and as such, it is a matter of care (Puig de la Bellacasa, 2017). In this sense, agroecology is an alternative because it departs from capitalist values as it depends on and predicts the need for the reproduction and recognition of plural economic values. Such recognition has been an endeavor of critical scholars for more than a century.

In this view, this article contributes to decentralize the hegemonic (capitalist-industrial) food systems as the main source of food security. Through the Cayambe case, I described how non-capitalist economic forms continue to exist despite the resiliency of the hegemonic system, that as a matter of fact, depend on such economic forms to exist. Without the solidarity and reciprocity within communities, life amidst the crisis would be poorly reproduced. In his sense, recalling Quijano's teachings: the capitalist system is hegemonic but not homogenic and it matters to put other economic forms, striving at the margins, to the center of our analysis.

[15] Looking into permaculture practices, Puig de la Bellacasa's book explores the simultaneous difficulties of decentering human agency as the starting point of care, situating it within the interrelations of other-beings and other-than-beings – whose biological labor that materializes care –, and enriching the interpretations of care as "keeping maintenance work, affectivity and ethics together" (2017, 217–18, my emphasis). In this line, the word "matter" in this article often means both "the importance of" something and how it materializes.

References

Altieri, M.A. and Nicholls, C.I. (2020) 'Agroecology and the reconstruction of a post-COVID-19 agriculture', The Journal of Peasant Studies, 47(5), pp. 881–898. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1080/03066150.2020.1782891.

Araujo, L. S. and Da Silva, A.T.R. (2022) 'JATARISHUN: Indigenous peasant uprisings of Ecuador and Good Living; [JATARISHUN: révoltes paysannes indigènes d'Équateur et de Bien Vivre]; [JATARISHUN: Revoltas indígenas camponesas do Equador e Bem Viver]', Caderno CRH. Available at: https://doi.org/10.9771/ccrh.v35i0.48997.

Becker, M. (2008) Indians and Leftists in the Making of Ecuador's Modern Indigenous Movements. Durham; London: Duke University Press.

Becker, M. (2011) Pachakutik: indigenous movements and electoral politics in Ecuador. Lanham, Md: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers (Critical currents in Latin American perspectives).

Broussard, N.H. (2019) 'What explains gender differences in food insecurity?', Food Policy, 83, pp. 180–194. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1016/j.foodpol.2019.01.003.

Clark, A. and Emmel, N. (2010). 'Realities Toolkit #13: Using walking interviews'. University of Manchester. Available at: https://hummedia.manchester.ac.uk/schools/soss/morgancentre/toolkits/13-toolkit-walking-interviews.pdf.

Clapp, J. and Moseley, W.G. (2020) 'This food crisis is different: COVID-19 and the fragility of the neoliberal food security order', The Journal of Peasant Studies, 47(7), pp. 1393–1417. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1080/03066150.2020.1823838.

Colloredo-Mansfeld, R. (1999) The Native Leisure Class: Consumption and Cultural Creativity in the Andes. 1st ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Colloredo-Mansfeld, R.J. (2009) Fighting like a community: Andean civil society in an era of Indian uprisings. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Desmarais, A.A., Claeys, P. and Trauger, A. (2017) Public policies for food sovereignty: Social movements and the state. London: Routledge.

Erazo, J. (2015) 'Governing Indigenous Territories: Enacting Sovereingty in Ecuadorian Amazon', American Anthropologist, 117(3), pp. 599–631. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1111/aman.12304.

Ferraro, E. (2011) 'Trueque: An Ethnographic Account of Barter, Trade and Money in Andean Ecuador', Journal of Latin American and Caribbean Anthropology, 16(1), pp. 168–184. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1111/j.19354940.2011.01129.x.

Friedemann-Sánchez, G. (2009) Assembling flowers and cultivating homes: labor and gender in Colombia. 1st pbk. ed. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books.

Ferguson, B.G. et al. (2019) 'Special issue editorial: What do we mean by agroecological scaling?', Agroecology and Sustainable Food Systems, 43(7–8), pp. 722–723. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1080/21683565.2019.1630908.

Giunta, I. (2014) 'Food sovereignty in Ecuador: peasant struggles and the challenge of institutionalization', The Journal of Peasant Studies, 41(6), pp. 1201–1224. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1080/03066150.2014.938057.

Gobierno Autónomo Descentralizado Intercultural y Plurinacional del Municipio Cayambe (GADIP Cayambe). (2015) Actualización del Plan de Desarrollo y Organización del Gobierno Autónomo Decentralizado Intercultural y Plurinacional Municipal de Cayambe 2015 - 2025. Cayambe: Gobierno Autónomo Descentralizado Intercultural y Plurinacional del Municipio Cayambe. https://municipiocayambe.gob.ec/images/ley_transparencia/LOTAIP/2018/literales/s/02._Plan_de_Ordenamiento_Territorial_del_Canton_Cayambe.pdf.

Gobierno Autónomo Descentralizado Intercultural y Plurinacional del Municipio Cayambe (GADIP Cayambe). (2020) Ordenanza del plan de uso y gestión del suelo del cantón Cayambe. Ordenanza. Vol. 04-CMC–2020. Cayambe: Gobierno Autónomo Descentralizado Intercultural y Plurinacional del Municipio Cayambe.

González De Molina, M. and Lopez-Garcia, D. (2021) 'Principles for designing Agroecology-based Local (territorial) Agri-food Systems: a critical revision', Agroecology and Sustainable Food Systems, 45(7), pp. 1050–1082. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1080/21683565.2021.1913690.

Gualavisi, J.E.P. (2016) El crescimiento acelerado de las plantaciones florícolas en el sector de guachalá y su incidencia en las comunidades aledañas de la parte baja de la parroquia Cangahua, cantón Cayambe, provincia Pichincha, durante los últimos cinco años. Licenciatura. Universidad Central del Ecuador.

Hann, C.M. and Hart, K. (2011) Economic anthropology: history, ethnography, critique. Cambridge, UK; Malden, MA: Polity Press.

Hart, K. (2007) 'Marcel Mauss: In Pursuit of the Whole. A Review Essay', Comparative Studies in Society and History, 49(2), pp. 473–485. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1017/S0010417507000564.

Intriago, R. et al. (2017) 'Agroecology in Ecuador: historical processes, achievements, and challenges', Agroecology and Sustainable Food Systems, 41(3–4), pp. 311–328. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1080/21683565.2017.1284174.

Korovkin, T. (2003) 'Cut-Flower Exports, Female Labor, and Community Participation in Highland Ecuador', Latin American Perspectives, 30(4), pp. 18–42. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1177/0094582X03030004005.

Kuhnlein, H.V. (2017) 'Gender roles, food system biodiversity, and food security in Indigenous Peoples' communities', Maternal & Child Nutrition, 13(S3), p. e12529. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1111/mcn.12529.

Kusenbach, M. (2003). Street phenomenology: The go-along as ethnographic research tool. Ethnography, 4(3), pp. 455–485.

Levidow, L., Sansolo, D. and Schiavinatto, M. (2022) 'EcoSol-agroecology networks respond to the Covid-19 crisis: building an economy of proximity in Brazil's Baixada Santista region', The Journal of Peasant Studies, 49(7), pp. 1409–1445. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1080/03066150.2022.2096447.

Li, T. (2014) Land's end: capitalist relations on an indigenous frontier. Durham ; London: Duke University Press.

López-García, D. et al. (2020) 'Exploring the Contradictions of Scaling: Action Plans for Agroecological Transition in Metropolitan Environments', Agroecology and Sustainable Food Systems 44 (4), pp. 467–89. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1080/21683565.2019.1649783.

López-Ridaura, S. (2002) 'Evaluating the sustainability of complex socio-environmental systems. the MESMIS framework', Ecological Indicators, 2(1–2), pp. 135–148. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1016/S1470-160X(02)00043-2.

López Toaquisa, J.W. (2019) Análisis de la Implementación del Sistema Participativo de Garantía para Fomentar la Producción Agroecológica en el Cantón Cayambe. Trabajo de Titulación presentado como requisito previo a la obtención del Título de Ingeniero Agrónomo. Universidad Central del Ecuador. Available at: http://www.dspace.uce.edu.ec/handle/25000/17765 (Accessed: 2 June 2023).

Lyall, A. et al. (2021) 'Agroecology, Supply Chains, and COVID-19: Lessons on Food System Transitions from Ecuador', Culture, Agriculture, Food and Environment, 43(2), pp. 137–146.

McKay, B., Nehring, R. and Walsh-Dilley, M. (2014) 'The "state" of food sovereignty in Latin America: political projects and alternative pathways in Venezuela, Ecuador and Bolivia', The Journal of Peasant Studies, 41(6), pp. 1175–1200. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1080/03066150.2014.964217.

Martínez Novo, C. (2021) Undoing multiculturalism: Resource Extraction and Indigenous Rights in Ecuador. Piittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press.

Mauss, M. (1950) The Gift: The Form and Reason for Exchange in Archaic Societies. Routledge. London. Available at: https://www.jstor.org/stable/2804090?origin=crossref (Accessed: 16 March 2023).

Mendez, V.E. et al. (eds) (2015) Agroecology: A Transdisciplinary, Participatory and Action-oriented Approach. 0 edn. CRC Press. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1201/b19500.

Méndez, V. et al. (2017). 'Integrating Agroecology and Participatory Action Research (PAR): Lessons from Central America.' Sustainability 9 (5), pp. 705. Available at: https://doi.org/10.3390/su9050705.

Mier Y Terán Giménez Cacho, M. et al. (2018) 'Bringing agroecology to scale: key drivers and emblematic cases', Agroecology and Sustainable Food Systems, 42(6), pp. 637–665. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1080/21683565.2018.1443313.

Montenegro de Wit, M. (2021) 'What grows from a pandemic? Toward an abolitionist agroecology', The Journal of Peasant Studies, 48(1), pp. 99–136. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1080/03066150.2020.1854741.

Murra, J. (2013) Formations économiques et politiques du monde andien.pdf. 1st ed. Paris: Éditions de la Maison des sciences de l'homme.

Peña, K. (2017) 'State-led grassroots participation and Ecuador's Land Law', in A.A. Desmarais, P. Claeys, and A. Trauger (eds) Public policies for food sovereignty: social movements and the state. London : New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, pp. 19–36.

Polanyi, K. (1977) The Livelihood of Man. Harry W. Pearson. New York: Academic Press (Studies in social discontinuity).

Puig de la Bellacasa, M. (2017) Matters of care: speculative ethics in more than human worlds. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press (Posthumanities, 41).

Quijano, A. (2000) 'Coloniality of Power, Eurocentrism, and Latin America', Nepantla: Views from South, pp. 533–579.

Quijano, A. (2020) Cuestiones y horizontes: de la dependencia histórico-estructural a la colonialidad/descolonialidad del poder: antología esencial. Primera edición. Buenos Aires: CLACSO (Colección Antologías).

Requelme, N. et al. (2019) Mujeres en resistencia y territorios agroecologicos - Construcción participativa de la Ordenanza de uso de espacios públicos para la comercialización de productos sanos en ferias agroecológicas-Cayambe. 1st edn. Cuenca: Abya Yala y Universidad Politecnica Salesiana.

Salomon, F. (1986) Native lords of Quito in the age of the Incas: the political economy of north-Andean chiefdoms. Cambridge [Cambridgeshire]; New York: Cambridge University Press (Cambridge studies in social anthropology, no. 59).

Schulte-Tenckhoff, I. (2015) "Homo cooperans: lessons from anthropology". Customizing a patchwork quilt: consolidating co-operative studies within the university world: in memoriam professor Ian MacPherson. pp. 27-33. Seinäjoki: University of Helsinki Ruralia Institute.

Radcliffe, S.A. (2015) Dilemmas of difference: indigenous women and the limits of postcolonial development policy. Duke University Press: Durham.

Rivera-Ferre, M.G. (2018) 'The resignification process of Agroecology: Competing narratives from governments, civil society and intergovernmental organizations', Agroecology and Sustainable Food Systems, 42(6), pp. 666–685. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1080/21683565.2018.1437498.

Tutillo, G. (2010) El impacto de la floricultura en la vida de las y los trabajadores jóvenes de las comunidades la Josefina y Cuniburo de la parroquia de Cangahua - Cayambe. Maestría en Ciencias Sociales. FLACSO Ecuador. Available at: https://repositorio.flacsoandes.edu.ec/xmlui/bitstream/handle/10469/2401/TFLACSO-2010GT.pdf?sequence=2&isAllowed=y (Accessed: 17 March 2023).

Wezel, A. et al. (2009) 'Agroecology as a science, a movement and a practice. A review', Agronomy for Sustainable Development, 29(4), pp. 503–515. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1051/agro/2009004.

EMERGING SCHOLARS OF AGRICULTURE AND FOOD

Sheila Manka. In memory.

It is with a very heavy and broken heart that we share the sad news of the death of our colleague and friend Dr. Sheila Manka following a short illness. Sheila was a Senior Lecturer at Mmpumalanga University, and previously taught at the North West University, in South Africa. Sheila was a member of the Executive Committee of RC40 as the African Regional Representative. Sheila shared the vision of elevating African Scholarship particularly among early career PhDs. Recognizing the budget constraints African scholars are often faced with, she also worked hard to establish the Working Group on Agrifood and Rural Sociology within the South African Sociological Association (SASA). In 2023, Sheila co-organized an early career workshop for rural and agrifood researchers, which again reflects her generous spirit and her professional ambitions to strengthen intellectual engagement and policy-relevant research focused around food, development, and justice.

Through many countless meetings and discussions, Sheila was passionate about how we could truly level the ground for African scholars and promote increased participation at the global level. We are extremely blessed to have had such a valiant regional representative who was not only proud but passionate and determined to make a difference despite the personal struggles she quietly bore as a young researcher.

Sheila leaves behind her husband and three children, and she will be sorely missed by family, friends and colleagues.

Thank you to Fridah Mubichi-Kut for these words commemorating Sheila.

In Sheila's memory, the IJSAF editorial team remain committed to publishing the first special series of SASA early career researchers papers soon.

ISSN: 0798-1759 | This Journal is double blind refereed.

Advancing early-career agri-food researchers publishing opportunities in Sub-Saharan Africa

Paper first received: 30 October 2023; Accepted: 30 April 2024; Published in final form: 24 February 2025
https://doi.org/10.48416/ijsaf.v30i1.693

Fridah MUBICHI-KUT,[1] Allison Marie LOCONTO,[2] and Sheila Ngoh MANKA[3]

Abstract

Social science researchers from Sub-Saharan Africa are underrepresented in internationally published and peer-reviewed journals. Their low representation is often attributed to factors such as limited funding, unfamiliarity with scholarly styles and language, and the lack of a support network that provides mentoring. Recognizing the knowledge gaps resulting from lack of training and exposure, the Research Committee on Sociology of Agriculture and Food (RC40) of the International Sociological Association (ISA) supported the development of a two-and-a-half-day virtual workshop and conference participation to address these concerns. Based on our experience, it is evident that virtual workshops provide an inexpensive and rapid avenue for capacity building. However, proficiency in producing high-quality publications requires continuous training and strong support from a mentoring network. Common difficulties observed include the lack of a conceptual framework to position field survey (or qualitative) results within current scientific debates. Weak engagement with theoretical concepts constantly debated in the social sciences also suggest that enduring competencies cannot be achieved through a short online workshop alone.

[1] Cornell University, USA
[2] Institut national de recherche pour l'agriculture, l'alimentation, l'environnement (INRAE), Laboratoire Interdisciplinaire Sciences Innovations et Sociétés (LISIS) (CNRS-INRAE-Université Gustave Eiffel), France
[3] University of Mmpumalanga, South Africa (posthumous)

Corresponding author: Fridah Mubichi-Kut, mfm96@cornell.edu

Biographical notes

Dr. Fridah Mubichi-Kut, is a Professor of Practice in Applied Economics and Policy at the Charles H. Dyson School of Applied Economics and Management, Cornell SC Johnson College of Business. Her research and work are focused on international development, agricultural technology adoption, gender equity, and engaged learning. She is a member of the International Sociological Association and Executive Committee member of the Research Committee on the Sociology of Agriculture and Food (RC40).

Prof. Dr. Allison Marie Loconto, is a sociologist of science and technology focusing on the governance of transitions to sustainable food systems, specifically on the metrics, models, standards and systems of certification that constitute emerging institutional innovations. She is the ISA's Vice President for Research, a founding member of the Multi-stakeholder Advisory Committee of the Sustainable Food Systems Programme of the One Planet Network (UN Environment) and a member of the French National Committee on Organic Agriculture. Professor Loconto is Chief Editor of the *International Journal of the Sociology of Agriculture and Food*, Associate Editor of the *Journal of Rural Studies*, Associate Editor of *Science as Culture* and co-editor of *Agrifood Transitions in the Anthropocene: Challenges, Contested Knowledge, and the Need for Change* (2024, Sage).

Dr. Sheila Ngoh Manka, was a senior lecturer at the University of Mpumalanga in South Africa. Her research interests included education, gender, health, food, social policies and particular interest in food consumption patterns in Africa. She was member of the International Sociological Association and Executive Committee member of the Research Committee on the Sociology of Agriculture and Food (RC40).

ISSN: 0798-1759 | This Journal is double blind refereed.

Introduction

Social science researchers from Sub Saharan Africa (SSA) are among the least represented and internationally published (Arvanitis et al., 2000; Waast and Gaillard 2018). Reasons for their low representation and participation are often attributed to factors such as limited funding, unfamiliarity with scholarly styles and language, and the lack of a support network that provides mentoring. Historically, social, behavioral and economic sciences have remained underfunded in comparison to natural sciences (Harris, 1967; Kilonzo and Magak, 2013; Solovey, 2020).

Inadequate funding significantly hampers social scientists' ability to conduct and publish high-quality research. Researchers face difficulties in covering publication fees and attending conferences that are crucial for epistemological advancements and professional development. Additionally, limited institutional funding restricts access to major citation databases such as Scopus and Web of Science, as well as international peer-reviewed journals - where most articles are not published in open access, but are protected by a pay-wall - that would allow them to stay updated with current research trends (Kilonzo and Magak, 2013). Early career PhDs landing faculty positions are often assigned lower level/introductory courses. These courses frequently have high enrollment numbers and provide little teaching and grading assistance. Separately, institutional incentives that might support mentoring by tenured faculty members are scarce. As a result, these conditions tend to restrict the research and publication opportunities for early career scholars in this world region.

Africans come from a rich multilingual background. Many, however, lack proficiency in English, the predominant language for international publications (Aldirdiri, 2024). For example, researchers often struggle to write effectively and convey their ideas due to inadequacies within their educational systems. Although English is taught as a second language, many students lack training in assignments that promote critical thinking, reflection and debate. In tandem, cultural norms and practices do not emphasize the importance of originality, which is coupled with a lack of awareness on how to correctly cite others' work further impeding their publication success.

RC40 Early Career Writing Workshop

Recognizing the gaps and opportunities faced by many early career SSA scholars, the Research Committee on Sociology of Agriculture and Food (RC40) of the International Sociological Association (ISA) supported a two-and-a-half-day virtual workshop in May 2023. The workshop was designed to assist early-career agri-food researchers seeking to move their papers to successful publication in an international journal. As such the main objectives were to:

- provide constructive feedback on working draft papers and,
- train participants on publishing strategies (e.g. identifying the correct journal outlet/ audience for work) and destigmatising rejection in academic publishing.

In January 2023, the workshop organizers, Drs. Sheila Manka, Fridah Mubichi-Kut and Allison Loconto invited applications from Ph.D. candidates, researchers and young faculty who had earned their PhDs in the last seven years, were living in Africa, and had not managed to publish in any international journal. Using Qualtrics survey (a cloud-based survey tool) applicants were invited to submit a short (400 words) abstract of their working paper, a short professional bio and their most recent curriculum vitae.

A total of 80 applications were received from 12 countries (Nigeria, Cameroon, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Malawi, Rwanda, South Africa, Zimbabwe, Tanzania, Namibia, Togo, Somalia, Senegal and Uganda). Nigeria had the highest number of applicants followed by Ethiopia and Kenya. The majority (56%) were male and almost half (47%) had not yet completed their PhDs. Following three subsequent rounds of screening that considered educational background, professional achievements/goals, and quality of the submitted abstract, the team

invited 14 applicants (7 male, 5 female and 2 other) from seven countries to submit their draft manuscript (approximately 6000-9000 words). By the beginning of May 2023, only seven (4 women and 3 men) met the deadline and hence participated in the virtual workshop.

Publishing in international journals is often perceived as an elusive and unattainable goal by many early-career scholars. This is mainly because many lack knowledge on, for example, how to identify suitable journals for their work. Noting that the majority of desk rejects are often on the basis of incongruous submissions and language, the first day focused on skill development. Participants were led in sessions focused on: identifying the right journal audience; communicating beyond one's local language, and offering practical tips for navigating the academic publishing landscape. To demystify the review processes and destigmatize rejection, participants were assigned a peer-review take-home assignment that required them to review their colleagues' manuscript and provide written feedback.

On the second day, participants were paired in teams of two along with an invited faculty[1] mentors in a 60-minute breakout session. Using an open discussion format, the peer reviewer along with faculty mentor provided constructive feedback to the author. The team also offered practical examples to improve the paper and helped come up with a plan of action that would support the revisions. Following the workshop, the organizers conducted a survey to evaluate the participants' experiences and skills gained and found that all participants agreed that they had gained new skills in publishing (Table 1).

Table 1: Pre and post workshop assessment of perceived publishing skills

Assessment of publishing skills ddevelopment	**Mean** (1-5 scale)
How would you rate the level of feedback you received from your peers?	4.29
How would you rate the level of effort you put into the peer review assignment?	4.14
How would you rate your level of skill/knowledge on publishing in peer review journals at start of the workshop?	3.29
The information provided on "Tips and tricks to successful publications" helped me gain a better understanding on how to select appropriate journals for my work.	4.14
How would you rate your ability to review manuscripts outside your primary discipline/ training BEFORE coming to the workshop?	2.71
How would you rate your ability to review manuscripts outside your primary discipline/ training after the workshop?	3.57

To minimize manuscript attrition rates and revision hell, research fellows were assigned to provide feedback, emotional and moral support until the paper was submitted to the journal. Working as the RC40 Africa Representative, Sheila secured funding that afforded the group to attend and present their working papers at the South African Sociological Association conference in July 2023. The following are the thematic focus areas of the workshop papers that were supported.

- Food sovereignty and the contours of organising from below in the South African food system
- Challenges faced by smallholder farmer on marketing of avocado in Gisagara district, Rwanda
- Constraints that impinge South African rural women's development
- Role of informal and formal seed systems in promoting seed security in Malawi
- Strategies for governing shared commons in Malawi's inland lakes

[1] Faculty mentors: Drs. Patrick Bottazzi, Kiran Odhav and Mamadou Goita

Lessons learned and introduction to the special section

The question of what it will take to increase SSA researchers' participation and publications in international peer-reviewed journals is one that warrants strong attention. Based on our experience it is evident that virtual workshops provide an inexpensive and rapid avenue through which capacity building can be attained. Nonetheless, proficiency in producing high quality publications requires continuous training and strong support from a mentoring network and cannot be solved by a short online workshop. Although most of the papers went through two rounds of double blinded peer reviews following the workshop, considerable revisions remained before they could be published in an international journal.

We find that a common difficulty is the lack of a conceptual framework that is able to position field survey (or qualitative) results within current scientific debates that enable social scientists to generalise their very contextualised results. Weak engagement with the theoretical concepts that are constantly debated in the social sciences often translates into convoluted explanations and inadequate epistemological contributions. Every discipline has its own cannons and ways of writing, which are indeed difficult to engage with depending upon where the author is starting their journey towards the sociology of agriculture and food. The RC40 community positions itself at the cross-roads of critical agrarian studies, science and technology studies and feminist epistemologies (Loconto et al., 2022) and the inclusion of new voices from around the world is what keeps this community vibrant and attentive to the power and knowledge dynamics of our changing agrifood systems (Carolan et al., 2022). For this reason, investing time and energy in supporting young scholars of agrifood studies to emerge as these new voices is important for the RC40 community.
This imperative goes well beyond SSA, it stretches from the proverbial centres to the farthest corners of the world. It concerns those scholars whose voices are emerging, at times softly and at others more loudly, both inside and outside of academia. To respond to the need to provide visibility and voice to this large group of scholar, the creation of a special section dedicated to the work of these emerging scholars is a priority for the *International Journal of Sociology of Agriculture and Food (IJSAF)* and should find a place in the forthcoming issues of the journal.

This issue opens the special section with two articles that were first discussed in our 2023 workshop. The first paper examines the efficacy of school feeding programs in South Africa. Based on a case study approach, the authors find that although the nationally supported feeding program contributed to improved school attendance and academic performance, systemic issues such as delayed food deliveries and limited community involvement hindered its effectiveness. In conclusion the authors advocate for a more holistic, community-integrated approach to ensure sustainable and impactful school feeding programs.

The second paper examines the dynamics of food sovereignty movements in South Africa. It analyzes how these movements interact with broader political, economic, and social structures. The author presents a dual typology of food movements, focusing on social justice and production. Utilizing a conjunctural analysis informed by Stuart Hall's concept of articulation, the paper argues that food movements in South Africa are influenced by the legacy of settler colonialism, racial capitalism, and ongoing class and ecological struggles. By exploring the relationship between local organizing efforts and global food sovereignty discourse, this study enhances our understanding of how food movements in the Global South address structural inequalities and outline pathways for transformative change.

We expect the next special section to contain the remaining papers, including a thematic analysis of the collection by the senior mentors who accompanied us through this process.

We close this essay with a few words from our hearts to our dearly departed colleauge Sheila, who unfortunately was not able to see the end result of all of her hard work.

It was a true privledge to collaborate with you on this initiative and we are sure that you would be proud of what your mentees achieved. Rest in peace dear colleauge.

We honor your vision of uplifting other early career African scholars and dedicate this special section to you!

References

Aldirdiri, O. 2024. 'Navigating the Digital Divide: Challenges and Opportunities in Research Publishing for African Scholars', *European Review*, 32(S1), pp. S92–S107. doi:10.1017/S1062798724000073.

Arvanitis R, Waast R and Gaillard J (2000) Science in Africa: A Bibliometric Panorama Using PASCAL Database. Scientometrics 47(3): 457-473.

Carolan M, Hale J, Bjørkhaug H, Dwiartama A, Hatanaka M, Hiraga M, Legun K, Loconto A and Wolf S (2022) A Front Porch for Critical Agrifood Studies: Engagement Across the 'Food System' Boundaries. *International Journal of Sociology of Agriculture and Food* 28(2): 1-6.

Harris, F.R., 1967. Political science and the proposal for a national social science foundation. *American Political Science Review*, *61*(4), pp.1088-1095.

Kilonzo, S.M. and Magak, K., 2013. Publish or perish: Challenges and prospects of social science research and publishing in institutions of higher learning in Kenya. *International Journal of Sociology*, *43*(1), pp.27-42.

Loconto AM, Psarikidou K and Marris C (2022) Towards a renewed sociology of agriculture and food: editorial introduction. International Journal of Sociology of Agriculture and Food 28(1): 1-5.

Solovey, M., 2020. *Social Science for What?: Battles over Public Funding for the" Other Sciences" at the National Science Foundation.* MIT Press.

Waast R and Gaillard J (2018) L'Afrique entre sciences nationales et marché international du travail scientifique. Les ancrages nationaux de la science mondiale XVIIIe-XXe siècles. Paris: IRD Éditions et Éditions des Archives contemporaines. 67-97.

Workshop organizers and Mentors

1. **Dr. Sheila Manka** was a senior lecturer at the University of Mpumalanga in South Africa. Her research interests included education, gender, health, food, social policies and particular interest in food consumption patterns in Africa. She was member of the International Sociological Association and Executive Committee member of the Research Committee on the Sociology of Agriculture and Food (RC40).

2. **Dr. Fridah Mubichi-Kut** is a Professor of Practice in Applied Economics and Policy. She is also the Executive Director of the Student Multidisciplinary Applied Research Teams (SMART) Program at the Cornell SC Johnson College of Business.

3. **Prof. Allison Marie Loconto** is a Research Professor at the French Research Institute for Agriculture, Food and Environment (INRAE) and Deputy Director of the Interdisciplinary Laboratory for Science, Innovation and Society (LISIS) at Gustave Eiffel University. She is the Vice President for Research of the International Sociological Association.

4. **Prof. Kiran Odhav**, is a sociologist and an associate researcher at Free State Universy. He has done research on Sport in South African universities and inequality in BRICS countries. He is currently working in the areas of the leisure industry in South Africa, youth and IT, and identities in the global south.

5. **Dr. Mamadou Goïta**, is Director of the Institut de Recherche et de Promotion des alternatives en Développement (IRPAD) and is a member of iPES-Food.

6. **Dr. Patrick Bottazzi**, is an Assistant Professor at the Institute of Geography, University of Bern and Visiting Professor at the Center for environmental governance and territorial development (GEDT) in Geneva.

The challenges and contexts of the Lokaleng School Feeding Scheme in the North West Province, South Africa

Paper first received: 30 August 2024; Accepted: 01 September 2024; Published in final form: 23 December 2024
https://doi.org/10.48416/ijsaf.v30i1.517

Bongi Bianca MKHOMBO,[1] Sheila Ngoh MANKA[2] and Kiran ODHAV[3]

Abstract

School Feeding Scheme Programmes (SFSP's) are globally present, especially in countries where child poverty and malnutrition reflect a crisis. This paper evaluates the Lokaleng Primary School feeding scheme programme in Mmabatho, North West Province, South Africa. It serves one of the poorest villages in the area, with a mean of six dependents per family, most of whom are unemployed and uneducated. This has resulted in food insecurity in the village. After outlining the schemes' challenges and benefits, the paper contextualises the schemes challenges by suggesting a more holistic and comprehensive approach focussed on the surrounding and extra-school conditions. A qualitative approach with in-depth one-on-one interviews was used. Study participants included schoolteachers, food suppliers (handlers), and parents of pupils. Data was analysed and presented using themes obtained from participants' responses. Most respondents found that the feeding scheme does benefit pupils educationally, with increased school enrolments and attendance, and improved academic performance as Maijo (2018) concurs. Other studies however show mixed results when it comes to pupils' physiological conditions, enrolment, or decreased dropout rates, and yet others show no correlation to such aspects. Difficult challenges remain in breaking the burden of poverty that families are exposed to, for which this paper gives some suggestions. One challenge identified in this study was the late delivery of food, resulting in irregular food supply to the school. The study makes baseline suggestions for the relevant government department, and for civics, to contribute to ensuring a more effective and sustainable school feeding programme.

[1] North West University, South Africa
[2] University of Mmpumalanga, South Africa (posthumous)
[3] Free State University, South Africa

Corresponding authors: Kiran Odhav, kiran.odhav@gmail.com

Biographical notes

Bongi Bianca Mkhombo is currently a master's student in Urban and Regional Planning at the University of the Free State. She has carried out research on water shortage affecting the Lenyenye community and the revitalisation of an agricultural town in Tzaneen. Bongi is interested in urban sociology.

Dr. Sheila Ngoh Manka was a senior lecturer at the University of Mpumalanga in South Africa. Her research interests included education, gender, health, food, social policies and particular interest in food consumption patterns in Africa. She was member of the International Sociological Association and Executive Committee member of the Research Committee on the Sociology of Agriculture and Food (RC40).

Prof. Kiran Odhav is a sociologist and an associate researcher at Free State Universy. He has done research on Sport in South African universities and inequality in BRICS countries. He is currently working in the areas of the leisure industry in South Africa, youth and IT, and identities in the global south.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT
This paper emerges out of Bianca Mkhombo's Honours research at North West University, South Africa.

DEDICATION
Sheila Manka, who passed on too early, had amazing tenacity. Bianca's dedication reads:

> *"This work is dedicated to the memory of my beloved research supervisor Sheila . I am forever grateful to have had the privilege of learning under your guidance. Your kindness, ever-present smile, and willingness to help made every challenge seem surmountable. Because of you, I discovered the joy and rigour of research—a gift I will carry with me always. Thank you for believing in me, teaching me, and inspiring me. You are deeply missed, and your legacy lives on in every step of my journey" (Bianca and Kiran).*

Introduction

School feeding programmes seek to address a problem arising out of poverty, malnutrition and unemployment in developing countries. Such programmes are a form of social protection to enhance educational experiences of needy primary school learners, while promoting punctual school attendance, reducing hunger and improving concentration. The aim is to foster general health by delivering meals or snacks to school children (Altman, 2009; Wang and Fawzi, 2020). Such programmes, apart from other independent local and international donor feeding programmes, are run within the context of a national and board school reform programme, and with local communities that need to be fully involved and take responsibility for them. Such involvement increases programme success and sustainability.

Both Gunderson (2003) and Drake, Lazrak, Fernandes, Chu, Kim, Ryckembusch, Nourozi, Bundy and Burbano (2020) argue that such programmes are significant for the nutritional and socio-economic status of the target group, which should be the most underserved food insecure areas, with relatively low rates of school attendance. After the election of democratic government in 1994, the National School Nutrition Programme was introduced as a presidential lead project, under the Reconstruction and Development Programme. The South African government, with the assistance of the New Partnership for African Development (NEPAD) or through Home Based Models, also provides poor schools with daily meals, for learners in poor socio-economic areas (DoE, 2011; National School Nutrition Program, DBE, 2023).

The Health Department initiated a 'Primary School Programme' (1994-2003), after which the Basic Education Department (DBE) took over and renamed it the 'National School Nutrition Programme' (NSNP, 2004). The aim was to enhance learning capacity through school feeding, increasing nutrition in schools, and promotion of sustainable food production. The shift was from a milk component of biscuits or peanut butter sandwiches for identified primary schools in 2004, to providing daily cooked meals to primary and secondary schools (DOE, 2011; DBE, National School Nutrition Program, 2023).

Every province has its own menu guide that states what children should be served on weekdays. The management of the meal provision is guided by a national manual of procedures, with a monthly report required from the education district-level authorities. Records are kept in the district office with regular provincial progress meetings that are supposed to take place in the regional office. However, due to a 'lack of funds' in North West Province, meetings are not held between provincial and district educational authorities. Monthly reports that are supposed to be submitted to the districts are usually not readily available, due to the lack of a filing system. South Africa uses two food procurement models: a centralised one sees ingredients purchased and delivered to schools, based on a service level agreement between suppliers and the Provincial Education Department. The decentralised model sees schools receiving provincial funds to procure services themselves. Four of the nine provinces, including North West, use the latter model.

The Department of Basic Education (DBE) issues a public tender order to supply food to schools, guided by the Preferential Procurement Policy Framework (Act no. 5 of 2000) for people who, historically, have been disadvantaged in terms of their gender, race or disability. The school committee consists of the principle, teachers and school governing body members, and is expected to oversee daily meal provision and monitor the programme's financial management.

Justification of the study

South African poverty levels have increased and are worsening annually, especially since 2011, and food scarcity has increased. The World Bank (2020) and UN (UNHDI and Development Report, 2020) respectively report 50% and 20% of South Africans (12 to 30 million people) are poor or poverty stricken. In 2005, school children in Lokaleng showed signs of malnutrition. Most are underweight and a majority of their families experience food insecurity. 75% of the children in Lokaleng Primary School are from disadvantaged backgrounds, and

most parents are unemployed. Most households depend on government social grants as a source of income (Tladi, 2019). Before the feeding scheme was established at the school, it had a high percentage of absenteeism as learners experienced hunger at home and at school. Lack of transportation contributed to absenteeism, as learners with empty stomachs had to walk long distances to school. Thus, the low enrolment rates and poor academic performances, and increasing chances of them falling into a poverty trap (Tladi, 2019). This paper investigates the challenges of the school feeding programme at Lokaleng Primary School, in addressing the food insecurity of vulnerable children. It also seeks to understand the impact of the school feeding scheme programme on learners, to identify challenges faced by the programme at the school, and to revisit possible broader frameworks and forces involved in these challenges.

The feeding scheme programme does broadly contribute to better nourishment and health for learners. Better nutrition means better physical and mental development, which leads to more productivity (Engelbrecht, 2015). The programme is therefore necessary, as it improves both the learners' school attendance and their academic performance, but such schemes must be contextualised to account for their failures and successes in the short and long term.

Literature review

The World Health Organization (WHO, 2020) defines health as a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being, and not just an absence of disease. The literature echoes this (Branca and Ferrari, 2002; SA Medical Research Council, 2008; Chakraborty and Jayaram, 2016). In 1959 the United Nations included health as a basic human right (UN website, 2024).

The NSNP has three aims: to feed children in schools; to provide education on nutrition; and to cultivate food gardens. Yet 96% of its budget goes to feeding, which results in the latter two aims being under-funded. The literature is positive about its reach, with possible spin offs for food production, for learning, cognitive abilities and brain capacity (Chhetri, Ghimmire, Prasad, Dura, Lamichane and Chhetri, 2024; Michael and Moore, 1995), for nutrition uptake (Jommaa, Mcdonell and Probart, 2011), and more recently for academic performance (Wang, 2020; Isaac, 2021).

Mabasa and Themane's (2000) earlier study of the challenges of stakeholder participation and lack of knowledge of feeding programmes is supported by Kaaur's (2021) more recent finding that school feeding schemes in India, Brazil and South Africa all face challenges of high numbers of school children and their high drop-out and repetition rates. South Africa and Tanzania experience challenges related to School Governing Body (SGB) members failing to encourage parental involvement in the programme. This results in theft, corruption and disappearance of food caused by those who are providing the food. To drive home the point of intransigent problems, it is important to cite research from two decades ago: Shaw (2001) reported that despite policy implementation, the Department of Education focused more on keeping records of accounts than on the benefits of the school feeding programme; and Del Rosso (1999) maintained that when monitoring and evaluation was done properly, it ensured food security and learners were given the required quantity and quality of food. The overall problem, as Devereux (2018) argues, is that the national feeding scheme's objectives are vague. Many problems persist, with much still unknown in terms of monitoring and evaluation, and with the need for more research on their design and delivery in different countries. The outstanding issues relate to the following: a need for country comparative policy research to assess aspects of food safety and modes of food procurement; the nutritional value of the foods supplied; nutrition education and its effect, if any, on knowledge and behaviour; and finally, how feeding schemes impact on livelihoods, for example in terms of farmers' incomes and job creation for food handlers. In this sense, the implementation of the aims of the National Nutrition Programme as specified in the national policy has still not been achieved.

The World Bank (2009) has consistently pronounced that school feeding programmes have substantial benefits for both the social protection and the education of children from impoverished families. For instance,

a subsequent World Bank report (Wadhwa, 2019) found that school feeding schemes resulted in nutritional improvement in low- to middle-income countries, and boosted enrolment and attendance rates. There are 9 million free school meals per day in South Africa, with the Cape Verde seeing half a million children benefitting, and Ghana has 1.5 million students benefitting. Avenues to support home grown meals can be seen in how many African countries use NEPAD support (2023), with some already using digital technologies for mobile money and other digital platforms to facilitate cash transfers as in Kenya and Nigeria as they seek to improve financial management and transparency.

Mostert's (2021) quantitative study finds a significant effect of school feeding schemes on the education and health outcomes of South African children. It shows improvement in the health of children who are ill, as well as higher school attendance rates and better academic achievement. The impact is higher in rural areas than in urban areas, and greater for boys than for girls. There are also positive spill over effects, such as the parents of children benefitting from such feeding schemes, spending less on food than non-beneficiary parents. The conclusion is that such feeding programmes support the South African population beyond the targeted children's education and health outcomes. Such schemes are however more effective in attracting children into school than keeping them there. They are social nets and not educational interventions, which means complementary programmes need to be added to feeding schemes, such as those promoting homegrown food (Chhetri et al., 2024; Powell, 2006; Langinger, 2011), or diversity as offered by the World Food Programme in Cameroon (WFP, 2009), or even information on how feeding programmes encourage local food production in a sustainable way (Verguet, Linasalle, Chakrabarti, Husain, Burbano and Bundy, 2020). Others (Chibuke, Ossai, Akamika, Onyemaechi, Edwin, Eweni and Azuogo, 2023) report that recipients complain of poor-quality food, in a Nigerian feeding scheme. The data reflects a dual history of feeding schemes at best. With this said, a methodological section follows here below, after which we present a conceptual framework for this paper.

Methodology

The study area is Lokaleng Primary School that falls under the Ngaka Modiri Molema District Municipality. The school is located in Lokaleng village on the outskirts of Mmabatho, its erstwhile capital that is now a suburb in the older Mahikeng town. The latter is now the capital city of North West Province, and located close to South Africa's border to Botswana. The unemployment rate is a staggering 53% (Quarterly Labour Force Survey, 2021). Lokaleng Primary School is deemed appropriate to investigate a school feeding scheme, being in the quintile category of poorer schools. It enables the researcher to assess the effectiveness of the Nutrition Programme in an area where it is needed. The map hereunder outlines its location.

Source: https://www.google.co.za/maps/@25.7975234,25.5872145,14z?entry=ttu&g_ep=EgoyMDI0MDgyMS4wIKXMDSoASAFQAw%3D%3D

The study assessed the School Feeding Scheme Programme by means of a qualitative case study, with in-depth exploration of a single phenomenon in its natural setting (Priya, 2021:95). Purposive sampling was used to select key informants, that is, food handlers and teachers selected for their involvement in the SFSP. South Africa's Nutrition Policy Guidelines (2010) state that teachers are the administrators of the SFSP. Purposive sampling identified and selected proficient and well-informed individuals on the topic at hand. Following Cresswell's (2014) view that a qualitative sample should be between five and 25 individuals, the target population was comprised of five teachers, five food handlers, and five parents. The sample size afforded a new and richly textured understanding of the case, with case-oriented data analysis. Data was collected through semi-structured interviews, allowing the interviewer to obtain in-depth information regarding participants' experiences and to discover any additional information valuable to the study. The study used thematic analyses in which similar data were reviewed and grouped together to reveal emerging themes. While the study inductively focussed on Lokaleng's feeding scheme, it also drew from the literature of other cases, and cited provincial statistics to gain an overall understanding of the provincial picture in terms of food security. The paper combines analysis from the school feeding scheme and from the provincial statistics in terms of household and nutrition security in the local area (Ngaka Modiri Molema district). Ethical guidelines were followed to conduct the study, through institutional permissions (NWU, DoE). Permission from participants was obtained to conduct interviews, and interviewees were assured of the confidentiality of their opinions, and of their choice to withdraw from the research at any time.

Conceptual framework

The conceptual framework of this paper is four-pronged, framed by the overarching objective as set out earlier in this paper: to determine the benefits and challenges of school feeding schemes. First, the paper adheres to the United Nations General Assembly's Declaration of the Rights of the Child (1959), affirming children's rights to protection, education, health care, shelter and nutrition.

Second, while the paper examines a particular case study (Lokaleng Primary School), it argues that working models of such schemes need to be developed for different regions, based on local circumstances such as poverty levels and economic hardship. Thus, while it may be ideal to provide locally produced food for such schemes, this is not always possible, as there might not be (sufficient) suppliers or even a centralized market for such supplies in the local area. Lokaleng Primary School serves as a sample of a feeding scheme, to extract lessons from it about what is possible in such circumstances.

Third, while national SFSP's exist in South Africa, with government policies to monitor and evaluate them, they face unabating challenges, particularly in the area of policy implementation. This means the contribution of such schemes to the overall academic and holistic development of the child remains somewhat unreachable for most of the recipients of the SFSP, particularly when there is no overall assessment of the schemes' impact on school children's academic performance, class attendance, and more longer terms goals. While there is most likely a positive healthier and more nutritious environment created by the SFSP's, the literature reflects, at best, mixed results on the broader outcomes of such schemes in terms of better academic performance, greater attendance, and more effective learning systems and results thereof.

The fourth aspect links this weakness to the issue of using local and/or regional models to deal with SFSs. It means that a greater effort needs to be made to involve multiple constituencies in school feeding schemes, so as to construct decentralized models of their operational and more long-term policy aims relating to better attendance, improved academic performance, and the impact of such schemes for poor households. It also means more quality education, more infrastructure where these are necessary, and more support or assessment and upgrading of unqualified teachers.

Results and findings

The study aimed to identify the benefits, challenges, and sustainability of the school feeding programmes at Lokaleng Primary School.

Benefits of the School Feeding Scheme Programme

To understand the impact of the school feeding scheme programme on learners (as referred to by participants and the Education Department), participants were asked how the scheme was beneficial to them. Some cited poverty reduction as a benefit. Teacher (i) stated the following:

> *The school feeding scheme…(sees to it that)…learners attend school regularly and…hunger has decreased. Learners are able to concentrate for a long time…Learners…sometimes sleep without eating. So…they know that they will be having breakfast…and they will not go back home with an empty stomach.*

Food handler (1) affirmed that:

> *Children…from homes…(with no)…income…(can)…get food…in school and go home with a full stomach. They…listen in class and participate in activities…Children seem happier and healthier since the feeding scheme…because of the healthy food we cook for them. They are even able to improve academically*

Parent (A) stated that:

> *The majority of…learners come from disadvantaged families...and attend school because they know that they will receive food.*

From the above quotes by a teacher, parent and food handler, attendance is reportedly improved, with positive impacts on academic learning or preparation, and children who are physically satiated and therefore able to concentrate on school tasks. It seems that there is improved school attendance thanks to the feeding scheme at the school where a majority come from disadvantaged background, even though the literature is ambivalent on such issues. Mostert (2021) has found a positive impact on South African school children's health, school attendance and academic achievements. This is supported by Verguet, Limasalle, Chakrabarti, Husain, Burbano, Drake and Bundy (2020) in a study on such schemes in low- to middle-income countries. On the other hand, Tomlinson's (2007) study of South Africa and Malawi found such schemes controversial, and pointed to the methodological problems of studies purporting a link between hunger and academic performance. Tomlinson cites the World Bank's statement that there is little evidence to show the impact of such schemes on children's nutritional status, and that such schemes may keep children in school, particularly girls, but they have no impact on the root causes of malnutrition and hunger. Yet, as Food handler (1) explained in the quote above, children from homes with no income go home with a full stomach, they listen and participate in class activities, and improve academically and seem healthier. Such a view supports those that see more healthy food and adequate food provision producing a healthier child and better academic results, and that such a school context does alleviate situations of dire deprivation at home.

Monitoring of the school feeding scheme programme.

Monitoring and evaluating feeding programmes are important to ensure that they are operating as planned and for sustainability. Participants were asked how the programme was monitored and who was responsible to ensure that it was functioning. Teacher (ii) stated the following:

> *I…(supervise)…the programme…(to)…ensure that the food is available for the learners and that they eat on time, while ensuring that they get a balanced diet.*

Food handler (2) remarked:

> *A supervisor…(teacher)…checks every morning how we prepare the food and…(a)…supervisor from the Department of Education comes…maybe once a term.*

The Principal affirmed the following:

> *One teacher…is the main programme facilitator, ensures food is enough for learners and reports in order for me as the school principal.*

Food availability, balanced diets, and the monitoring of these by two persons is done either regularly (teacher) or irregularly (DoE representative), according to reports by the sample of three constituencies interviewed, that is, teachers, parents and food handlers. One teacher who monitors and evaluates the programme pointed to the importance of programme sustainability, which is an important aspect discussed further on in this section. The same sample of constituencies also indicates a low level of monitoring by the DoE. Some participants reported that the relevant DoE supervisors appeared only quarterly.

In terms of monitoring and evaluation of the feeding scheme, teachers verify a functional system, with statements suggesting 'regular inspections of adherence to hygiene standards, of food provision, and of the quality of the programme.' Yet the language of research participants remains conditional, with qualifying phrases such as 'from my understanding', or statements that administrators (teacher/s) 'might review' meal quality, which suggest that the monitoring and evaluation have a more loosely structured framework than is needed. Whatever documentation emerges from the programme seems to remain in DoE offices, and DoE visits are infrequent.

Furthermore, Teacher (iii) (cum-administrator) of the feeding scheme reported the following:

> *I oversee…implementation…with the principal and food handlers to ensure…meals are provided efficiently and… meet…(learners)…nutritional needs...I…monitor the impact of the programme on the learner's health, attendance and academic performance, providing feedback to improve the programme, as needed.*

While the above statement points to monitoring and evaluation and is in tandem with the views of the food handler cited earlier, there is no further corroboration of such statements. This is in relation to systems efficiency, food quality or nutrition, and even the long-term impact of the food scheme, school attendance and academic performance. While participants agree on the food scheme's positive impact, these statements do not suggest any long-term effect or impact. Moreover, no mention is made of nutrition experts regularly checking nutritional value, its diverse offerings, and the long-term impact of the school feeding scheme. The following gives credence to such an argument. Parent B stated the following:

> *There are inconsistencies in…quality and variety of meals…Children expressed dissatisfaction with the taste and nutritional value of the food, which is concerning*

The above was corroborated by Parent (C), who expressed it in the following way:

> *My child…complained about…inadequate…(meal) portions…leaving him…hungry and dissatisfied with the overall meal experience. I…noticed…a limited variety of food options provided which may lead to monotony and decreased interest in meals.*

One major difficulty of food programmes is the internal monitoring and evaluation process, at times due to lack of skills and capacity. Only two teachers are assigned to the Lokaleng programme, which includes writing reports and sustaining the programme, but the multiple tasks may become overwhelming and consequently compromise aspects of the programme. The use of available human resources is another aspect that could be enhanced if multiple constituencies were involved, as discussed in the next section. The Department of Education (DoE, 2009) stipulates that district offices should monitor actual implementation of school nutrition programmes by making regular visits to schools where monitoring and evaluation checklists are completed. The DBE (2011-2012) specifies that schools need daily visits, with phone calls to every other school in the district to monitor the state of the feeding scheme. However, as mentioned above, stakeholder perceptions indicate that DBE visits are once a quarter only. The DBE (2023) guidelines for evaluation and monitoring of such programmes include the following:

1. To develop and monitor the implementation of a framework on the national school nutrition programme;
2. To contribute to enhanced learning capacity through school feeding programmes;
3. To promote and support food production and improve food security in school
4. communities;
5. To strengthen nutrition education in schools and communities;
6. To monitor compliance with the DBE and treasury regulations.

These goals are noble in their intentions, but as a conglomerate of aims, they are far from being achieved, as the case of the Lokaleng feeding programme shows. Much more is needed in this regard to achieve the six points above. This does not mean that what has been achieved at Lokaleng so far is not meaningful, useful or to the advantage of school learners. Rather, it is a question of the system of food provision, of stakeholder engagement, and of building on what is available in the context of particular settings in schools, communities and regions where school feeding programmes are run. It is also about the use of human and other resources that are available and can be used in the feeding programmes. These points are elaborated on in the discussion section that follows hereunder. For now, it is worth identifying the particular issues related to stakeholder involvement at Lokaleng, to then go on to discuss its ramifications and possible solutions to its challenges, not just at Lokaleng but at institutions and communities that are involved in such programmes or are impacted by them.

Involvement in the feeding scheme programme

Since the Nutrition Programme Guidelines suggests community partners in school efforts, this study sought to understand their role in the SFSP. The following responses emerged:
Parent (D) stated the following on the non-involvement of parents in feeding schemes:

> *There is no involvement because the principal does not let us parents get involved in anything that has to do with the feeding scheme.*

Such a view, of low stakeholder participation, is corroborated by Food handler 2:

> *My involvement is to cook and dish out for the children. I am not involved in any decision making such as to how the menu should be.*

Parent (E)'s views are in tandem with such a view:

> *I am part of the SGB…(with)…a grandchild in this school. However, I would not say I am involved in any way because I just come when we have a meeting where we are shown reports of the feeding scheme.*

The above makes it clear that cross constituency collaboration is low in the scheme, with neither food handlers nor (SGB) parents being involved. This is also the case of parents not ostensibly being allowed to get involved, which is highly irregular in relation to the DBE guidelines cited above. One parent's misgivings of 'being ungrateful' reflects poorly, both on the programme's operations and on how poor parents may be further disenfranchised in terms of their status of being poor and on the receiving end of 'charity', instead of being based on the UN principle of the rights of such children.

Challenges faced by the Lokaleng School Feeding Scheme Programme

School feeding scheme programmes have issues worldwide. Wang and Fawzi (2020) cite good practices in this respect in LMICs, but also challenges and shortcomings, as studies on the topic show. Intermittent or late delivery of food was identified as a challenge in the Western Cape (Manje and Jita, 2019). One objective of our study was to identify such challenges. In the case of Lokaleng Primary, Parent (D) thus affirmed the following:

> *Food supply is one of the biggest problems…the school is facing. Sometimes children do not receive food for 4 or 5 days because the principal says the Department of Education has not paid yet…the school has not received funds to purchase food.*

The school principal corroborated the parents' view with the following statement:

> *As…principal of the school, I…receive a cheque from the (Education) Department to…(buy)…the groceries needed but sometimes a late deposit by the Department is made therefore there will be a delay in purchasing the food.*

Such late payments reflect further inconsistencies in the system. Some participants raised the issue of food expiration and allergies. Parent (E) stated the following:

> *Some…(purchased)…food…is expired [outdated]…the school should consider changing or substituting some meals with others, due to learners being allergic to certain foods.*

Outdated food can raise suspicions of malpractice, and while some of the challenges faced may be structural (how to disburse funds or food, how to use limited infrastructure or capacity), others are more basic and can be avoided. As for water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) conditions, Lokaleng School seems to comply. It is not clear however if all schools in the province are compliant with what the World Health Organization (WHO) states is relevant when children are under the level of optimal sanitation conditions, including ablution conditions (soap, towels, clean toilets). Moreover, the Human Science Research Council reports (SABC news, 20-8-2024), contrary to widely held views, that South Africa is not food secure, which compounds the problem of food and health conditions.

Discussion

Five critical aspects of school feeding schemes are discernible and need to be discussed. The first is the discourse on rights of various kinds; second, the necessity of involving multiple constituencies and aspects in such schemes; third, macro concerns around food, health and the environment; fourth, the need for more research on the agri-business industry; and fifth, the construction or adaptation of models of administration, operationalisation, and systems of implementation. There are models of implementation in the literature, as outlined by Droomer, Cooper-Bell, Linderbloom, Scholtz and Besata (2023), setting out various aspects of implementation, voucher systems, and direct transfers that would also be useful for schools. In this section, the five aspects discussed are used as lynchpins for a more relevant, expressive and cohesive form of thinking of such food schemes, and which may then be applied as guidelines to Lokaleng School and other schools in such contexts.

Food provision as a human right

The United Nations Charter (nd) and that of the World Health Organization (nd) both assert numerous children's rights. The former cites over 40 such rights, including the provision of food. African children's rights are particularly important in the 21st century. Globally, the continent has the youngest demographic age: 70% of sub-Saharan Africa is under-30 years old, and 42% is under 15 years of age. The African Charter on Human and People's Rights (2006) includes health rights, and the UN Charter asserts the right to life survival (right to life and for development in the best possible way), free primary education, family guidance and togetherness. Such rights redefine children as socio-legal entities, particularly in vulnerable societies. The aim of such assertions is to counter the phenomenon of child dependency translating into oppression and abuse of children. Similarly, parents from lower socio-economic backgrounds should not be excluded from decision making in the operations of feedings schemes. To contextualise such assertions, Table A hereunder reflects the dire circumstances of households and children in North West Province.

Table A (below) serves a useful heuristic function, to reflect on the relevance of rights in context. Lokaleng is situated in Ngaka Modiri Molema district (2nd last row in Table A above), where food security sits at a paltry 28% and severe food insecurity at an alarming 26%. Severe and moderate household hunger adds up to over 30%, and at-risk food consumption is at 60% if the borderline (38%) and poor (22%) scores are added up. In light of UN assertions of children's rights, which are country to country agreements on such rights, these figures are unacceptable by South Africa's own agreements as a participating country at the UN.

Table A: North West Food and Nutrition Security situation based on selected indicators

DISTRICTS	FOOD SECURITY INDICATORS (%)											
	Household Food Insecurity Access Scale (HFIAS)			Household Hunger Scale (HHS)			Household Dietary Diversity Score (HDDS)			Food Consumption Score (FCS)		
	Food Secure	Mild/ Moderate	Severe	Little/No	Moderate	Severe	Highest	Medium	Lowest	Acceptable	Borderline	Poor
Bojanala	27.0	50.0	22.0	74.0	17.0	10.0	82.0	13.0	5.0	48.0	33.0	19.0
Dr Kenneth Kaunda	20.0	46.0	34.0	59.0	28.0	13.0	67.0	22.0	10.0	51.0	26.0	22.0
Dr Ruth Segomotsi Mompati	22.0	50.0	29.0	64.0	25.0	10.0	77.0	18.0	5.0	37.0	36.0	27.0
Ngaka Modiri Molema	28.0	46.0	26.0	69.0	23.0	8.0	73.0	21.0	6.0	40.0	38.0	22.0
Province	25.5	56.0	25.9	69.9	21.2	9.8	76.8	17.1	6.1	44.8	33.9	21.3

Source: North West Provincial Report: Food and Nutrition Security (2023: 16)

The following statement by Teacher (iv) outlines the situation at Lokaleng Primary:

> *The…programme…provides…(the learner with)…equality…(as all)…receive the same meal regardless of…background…(It)…can help reduce the stigma…(of)… poverty and food insecurity…(It)…encourages school attendance as children are motivated to come to school knowing they will receive a meal.*

This is all true, but one has to remember that the local situation of problems also reflects a wider problem in the province. Interventions are therefore necessary if the aim is to shift from Table A's provincial figures of 55.2% risky food situation (adding 33.9% borderline and 21.3% poor food consumption score) to a more positive one. Thus, while there are weaknesses and strengths to Lokaleng's administration of its food distribution, there remains much to be done in terms of the wider social nexus of interventions. Parent (E) commented:

> *The…feeding programme…(is crucial as)…it relieves some…financial burdens of families…(as a)…majority…learners come from poor households. As an unemployed parent…I don't have money to buy food for my child's lunch box.*

The necessity of involving multiple constituencies

In addition to using UN and WHO guidelines, it is crucial that multiple civic, government and private sector constituencies be involved in such feedings schemes. It is also vitally important that parents, through their involvement in the feeding schemes or school structures, be included in the decision-making process. Parent (E) echoed feelings of being marginal to the feeding scheme, reported by another parent quoted above:

> *I have never been involved nor heard anything in parent's meetings…(about)…the school feeding scheme. I do not think we even have a say because it seems as if they are doing us a favour so we may seem ungrateful if we were to speak on it.*

This exclusion of parents from such schemes is one glaring weakness of food disbursements. Parents' inclusion can imply a number of things, from assisting in the programme, to keeping close to it, or receiving alleviating support if part-time or voluntary work is not available in the programme. As mentioned earlier, NEPAD supports such programmes, which means that pathways out of funding problems are possible. This calls for multiple forms of partnerships, when these are possible, so that the effort is more collective and does not isolate parents or exclude them from the programme. Some authors (Bryant, Burton, O'Kane, Woodside,

Ahem, Garnett, Spence, Sharif, Rutter, Baker and Evans, 2023) even suggest children's and adult workshops, which makes sense as such a shift would fulfil various needs: to train parents and children, to include them in the decision making, to gain their input and participation directly, to knit the social fabric of the school with its multiple constituencies, and to connect the programme to those whose interests are purportedly being served. Structures such as the existing Parent-Teacher Associations can be used, or in the case of Lokaleng, a parent association can be formed to empower parents to partake in school affairs if they can find the time to do so.

This particular aspect of involving multiple constituencies is also emphasized by the United Nations and the African Union (FAO, UN, 2022), and by the related literature (Munje and Jita, 2019; UNESCO, 2004). The former cite training that is needed on collaboration and professionalism, while the latter cite consensus building on policy and objectives. Thus, the issue of meal ration shortfalls can also be dealt with through such multi-constituency involvement. Moreover, more precision on the nutritional value of food provided is surely needed, with capacity provision in this regard, to monitor food systems more closely and implement interventions where required.

Sub-Saharan Africa has limited government capacity, particularly for youth, which makes development prospects low. Support for such programmes as feeding schemes and the development of multiple partnerships is therefore crucial. FAO assertions, directed at Ivory Coast's implementation of agri-food systems concerning youth, are relevant here. In particular, the FAO stresses sustainability and capacity development with multiple UN agencies and workshops, and the need for gender equality, as well as for sustainability in the economic, environmental and technological fields. There are various civic efforts at food production that are not supported, aimed at weaving a front of home-grown food production. Three such efforts were cursorily identified: a PhD student producing vegetables on a small scale; a micro-producing entrepreneur of fresh vegetables; and a government programme supporting families ravaged by apartheid, fostering diverse small-crop development.

Shifting macro-parameters of food regimes

As suggesting a wider set of participative constituencies may raise other issues, including around corporates and narrow vested interests, any model would need to carefully discern such interests and stakeholders. It would also require some focus on inter-departmental co-operation in government, that could contribute to implementing feeding schemes and broadening their scope to related aspects that improve the conditions of poor households. In the case of Mahikeng, where Lokaleng is located, there are no local fresh food markets to supply consumers or schools. As a result, corporates are in charge of supply, or small food handlers purchase from corporates to supply schools. There is a broad need to revisit the chain of the fresh food system (and the whole industrial chain), bearing in mind how diverse nutrition is guaranteed or even why school curricula need to include aspects of food and school gardens, if these are not already included therein. Some interview participants (teacher-administrator and food handler, cited earlier) mention healthy diet food, simply as broad cursory statements relating to general nutritional value. There is no corroboration of its nutritious diversity. What also needs to be discerned are the corporate structures that the food system passes through, including genetically modified (GM) foods. Food risks in South Africa are not immune from the dangers of industrial chains: the South African National Biodiversity Institute (SANBI) cites two basic foods being problematic, in the quest for wholesome food: one is a staple food (maize) and the other is traditionally considered very healthy to consume (soya):

> *Soybean and maize are commercialised in South Africa…Soybean…(is)…95% GM, and maize…(more)….. than 85% GM (SANBI, 2023).*

Deepening efforts for more nutrient food value and for alternative foods

In addition to such macro issues, lack of diversity and portion sizes in food provision under the said school

programme remain problematic, as one parent decried. Mahugu's (2021) study on nutrition in Kwa-Zulu-Natal cites challenges of food preferences, culture, late payment to service providers, and lack of training for relevant stakeholders. Onyenweaku and Kesa (2023) found that feeding schemes have positive impacts on numerous conditions relating to poverty (such as unemployment and dependency). Yet they also found some with flavourless food across four provinces in South Africa (including North West). While capacity and funding may be a problem at the school or with public administrators not taking their role seriously or unable to do so, the situation also depends on other higher up structures needing to be in place to maintain, monitor and sustain a high-quality food regime. As indicated herein earlier, systems are not always fully functional and require necessary interventions by public bodies, whether government or civic. The role of relevant actors is crucial, as indicated by other authors in another context (Chhetri, Ghimire, Aryal, Dura, Lamichhane and Chhetri, 2023), showing how a home-grown model with locally produced food involving cooperatives and farmers can work, and with significant parental involvement in the programme. It is also possible for parents, if not for school children, to get involved in home and school gardens.

More research is also needed on South Africa's role and participation in the global food industrial chain and on the consequences of such linkages, to determine strategic models for provinces, local areas or regions. While government does disburse funds for diverse forms of social protection, the lack of food and employment, along with issues pertaining to quality schooling, are a trifactor of toxic conditions that needs further study and intervention, especially in rural areas where there is little or no industrial growth. There is also little in the way of alternative forms of food that can make up basic food baskets. What alternatives there are, such as indigenous foods, ethnic varieties and foods from the region and off the continent, all remain part of the general market structures. This is particularly so in rural areas with weaker civic structures and where there is less pressure on government to build on these alternatives, leaving the order of the market intact, to the detriment of the poor and vulnerable. This impacts most on poor families, and particularly families such as those in Lokaleng. This study took Lokaleng as a case, but the village, school and wider context need consideration, including its neighbourly proximity to North West University, a national institution that needs to have a greater involvement in the school, village or its community. It is also worth noting that Lokaleng saw service delivery protests in 2021, related to food parcel deliveries during the COVID-19 period (Rammutla in 'Maftownian Online', 2021).

Appropriating school feeding models as the context determines

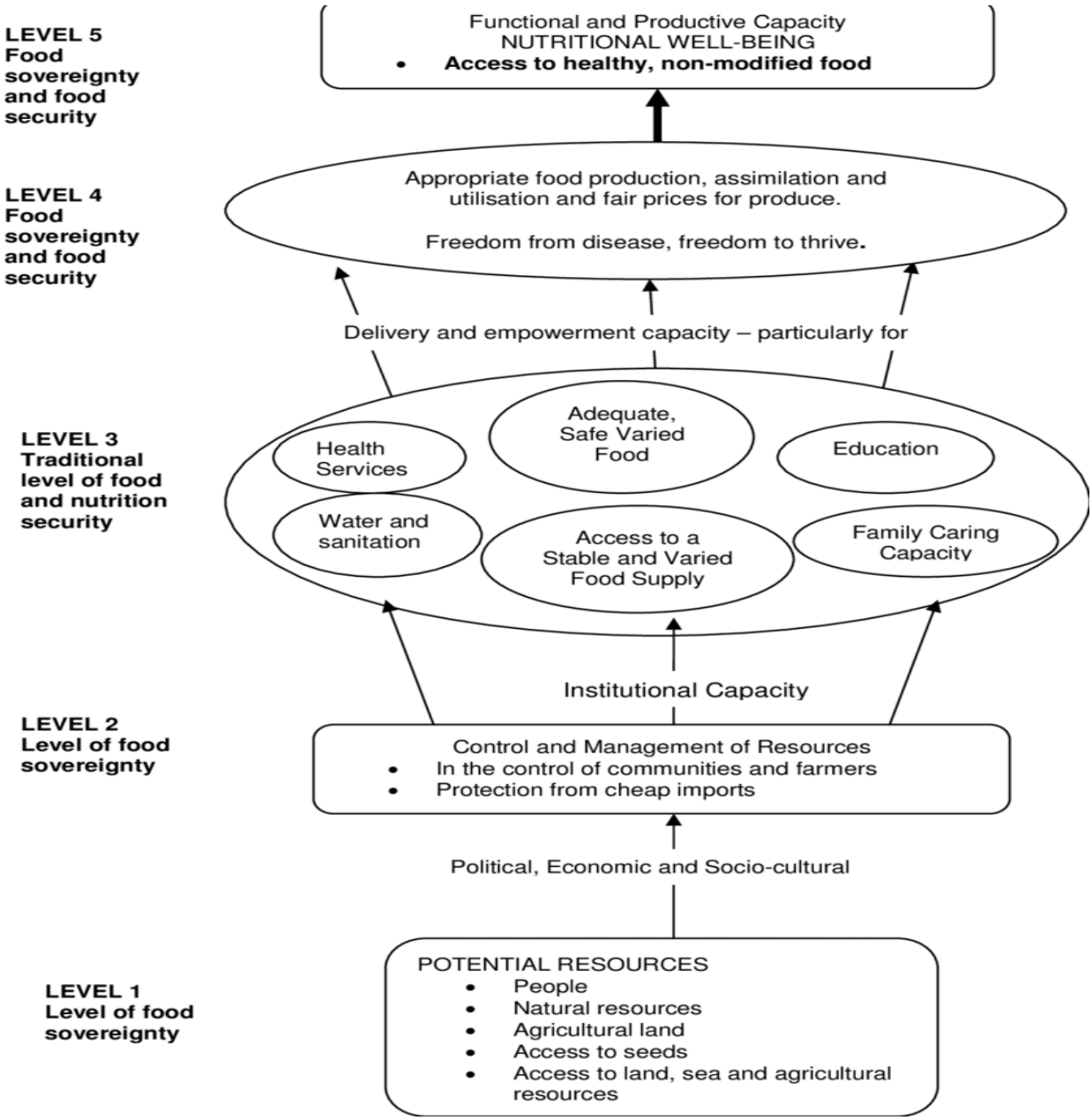
Finally, while this paper has made suggestions relating to feeding schemes, there is also a need to work on determining what the most appropriate model is in particular contexts. Such a model can only be worked out by multiple-constituency input and a shift of the changes in the micro- and macro-environment, which is also contingent on political will from the provincial government. It means inter-Departmental work, between for instance the Departments of Education, Social Development, Health and Agriculture, as well as other Departments involved in poverty and entrepreneurial activities, to offer multi-Department funds and the many-sided views to resolving problems. This paper pointed to some underlying problems that need addressing, and to a more decisive framework to redress feeding scheme shortcomings. Furthermore, there is the private sector that could be of use with funds and projects, and support by NEPAD for SFSP's.

While the kinds of possible models are diverse and context dependent, an outline of a model serving to develop working models will be based on the circumstances, the region, and the social, economic and other forces at play. A summary of a framework suggested by Tomlinson (2015) would be useful to develop variations in the different school districts and regions.

Tomlinson (2015) argues that feeding schemes in South Africa have huge differences regarding food providers (multiple or single), households suffering food insecurity, and poorer provinces feeding pupils intermittently while the richer provinces feed them five days a week. Tomlinson (2015) also cites private Grade R (pre-primary school) levels that are neglected, particularly in rural or poor urban areas. South African feeding

schemes are complicated and expensive, have a low coverage, are inconsistent, and are not nutritionally comprehensive. Most have implementation problems that stem from management difficulties. He also points to feeding programmes seeing a steady drop in pupil numbers since programme inception (1994).

Diagram B



Source: Research Gate: https://www.researchgate.net/figure/Food-sovereignty-and-school-feeding_fig1_252649665/download?_tp=eyJjb250ZXh0Ijp7ImZpcnN0UGFnZSI6InB1YmxpY2F0aW9uIiwicGFnZSI6Il9kaXJlY3QifX0. Retrieved on 16 August 2024.

There are moreover vast differences: for instance, 20 pupils being fed in one school, and 1000 in another. Tomlinson therefore suggests a more refined targeting of schools to run the programme, an improved management system, and guidelines that set a minimum quantity of micro-nutrients in diets, and that discourage use of fortified commercial foods. This speaks to the point raised earlier, of the need to develop local food networks and to begin to cut the dependency on corporate supply of foods.

Conclusion and recommendations

While this paper began as an empirical study of Lokaleng School's feeding scheme, it did not limit its arguments to that case, due to the overarching contexts, provincial and local socio-economic conditions, markets (or lack of their presence in civil society), and the institutional surroundings of the school. While Lokaleng's SFSP is delivering food, albeit with some administrative hiccups, the case provides a general point of departure to argue for more refined policy practice to support such schemes. This paper has used the Lokaleng Feeding Scheme to argue the more general point that macro-social structures are also necessary to change: for more intensive multi-constituency participation; for the deepening of a human rights culture in the food regime provided at schools; for more capacitation at local levels to function optimally in tackling the complex problems of poverty and its effects; for providing quality education to the relevant quintile schools; and for sustainable development of those that have been economically disenfranchised, after 30 years of political liberation. This means that such schools also need to be encased within provincial operational and implementation plans for turning their food programmes around and ensuring a more effective, efficient and sustainable effort at one of the most vulnerable constituencies (youth) that is important for the future of the country. There is also the alternative support for feeding schemes and alternative food regimes (indigenous food) that can be fostered with some role for schools, parents or the community concerned. It goes without saying that policy and implementation would need to be enhanced by such efforts and that the aim would be long term, both for schools and for their communities.

References

Adelman S, Gilligan D and Lehrer K (2008) The education and nutrition impacts of alternative food for education programs in northern Uganda. In: *Conference Social Protection for the Poorest in Africa: Learning from Experience*. Entebbe, Uganda, 8-10 September 2010.

African Union (2006) African Youth Charter. Available at: https://au.int/sites/default/files/treaties/7789-treaty-0033_-_african_youth_charter_e.pdf. (accessed 20 July 2024).

Agu CI, Ossai EN, Ogah OE, Agu IC, Akamike I, Ugwu GO, Edwin N, Ewenyi BL and Azuogu BN. (2023) An appraisal of the implementation of the national school feeding programme and its effect on enrolment and attendance in public primary schools in Southeast, Nigeria: perception of heads of schools. *BMC Nutrition* 9(37): 1-10.

Ahmed AU (2004) Assessing the performance of conditional cash transfer programs for girls and boys in primary and secondary schools in Bangladesh. Report, International Food Policy Research Institute, Washington D.C, April.

Altman M (2009) Household food security status in South Africa. *Agrekon* 48(4): 345-361.

Ambali A, Dugbazah J, Glover B, Mbuli B, Kungade C and Shikwambane N (2023) Leaving no child behind: Improving school feeding programmes to enhance primary school education enrolment in Africa. In: New Partnership for Africa's Development Blog. Available at: https://www.nepad.org/blog/leaving-no-child-behind-improving-school-feeding-programmes-enhance-primary-school-education (accessed 11 May 2024).

Anderson SA (1990) Core indicators of nutritional state for difficult-to-sample populations. *The Journal of Nutrition* 120(11): 1557–1599.

African Union Development Agency, AUDA-NEPAD. Leaving No Child Behind: Improving School Feeding Programmes To Enhance Primary School Education Enrolment In Africa, Blog, April 11 2023. Available at: https://www.nepad.org/blog/leaving-no-child-behind-improving-school-feeding-programmes-enhance-primary-school-education (accessed 20 December 2024).

Babbie E (2011) *The Basics of Social Research*. Belmont: Wadsworth

Baxter P and Jack S (2008) Qualitative case study methodology: study design and implementation for novice researchers. *The Qualitative Report* 13(4): 544–559.

Bryant M, Burton W, O'Kane N, Woodside JV, Ahern S, Garnett P, Spence S, Sharif A, Rutter H, Baker T and Evans CEL (2023) Understanding school food systems to support the development and implementation of food-based policies and interventions. *International Journal of Behavioural Nutrition and Physical Activity* 20(1): 29-41.

Bundy DAP, Burbano C, Grosh M, Gelli A, Jukes M and Drake L (2009) *Rethinking school feeding: social safety nets, child development, and the education sector*. Washington, DC: World Bank.

Burchi F and De Muro P (2012) *A Human Development and Capability Approach to Food Security: Conceptual Framework and Informational Basis*. Working Paper for the United Nations Development Programme. Working Paper no. 009, 1 February.

Chabaya O, Chakanyuka S and Ndamba GT (2011) *Research methods. A module DEP 206 for diploma in education (primary)*. Master's dissertation, Zimbabwe Open University, Zimbabwe.

Chakraborty T and Jayaraman R (2016) *School feeding and learning achievement: evidence from India's midday meal program*. Discussion paper for IZA. Discussion paper no. 10086, 13 July. Bonn: Institute for the Study of Labour.

Chhetri R, Ghimire S, Aryal P, Dura P, Lamichhane P and Chhetri G (2024) Transformative effects of mid-day school meal program in Nuwakot district through homegrown model: a case study of Nepal. *World Journal of Advanced Research and Reviews* 21(02): 808–822.

Clark JM (2006) Article title. In: Blog title. Available at: www.blogit.com/johnmatthewclark (accessed 20 August 2011).

Creswell JW (2013) *Qualitative inquiry and research design: choosing among five approaches* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.

Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (1996). *Act 108 of 1996*. Pretoria: Government Printer.

David M and Sutton DC (2011) *Social Research: An Introduction* (2nd Ed) London: Sage publisher.

Del Rosso JM and Marek T (1996) *Class action: improving school performance in the developing world through better health and nutrition*. Washington, DC, World Bank.

Dheressa DK (2011) *Education in focus: impacts of school feeding program on school participation: a case study in Dara Woreda of Sidama Zone, Southern Ethiopia*. Master's Thesis, Norwegian University of Life Sciences, Norway.

Department of Basic Education (2011a) National School Nutrition Programme Annual Report, Department of Basic Education, South Africa, May.

Department of Basic Education (2011b) Equipment and Utensils Guidelines for the National School Nutrition Programme. Report, Department of Basic Education, South Africa, September.

Department of Basic Education (2011c) Strategic Plan 2011-2014. Report, Department of Basic Education, South Africa, March.

Department of Education and Culture, Province of KwaZulu-Natal (2011) Understanding School Governance Manual 1: Introduction to School Governance.

Department of basic education (2021) National School Nutrition Programme. Available at: https://www.education.gov.za/Programmes/NationalSchoolNutritionProgramme.aspx (accessed 19 March 2023).

Devereux S (2001) Sen's entitlement approach: critiques and counter-critiques. *Institute of Development Studies Bulletin* 29(3): 67–76.

Devereux S, Hochfeld T, Karriem A, Mensah C, Morahanye M, Msimango T, Mukubonda A, Naicker S, Nkomo G, Sanders G and Sanousi M (2018) *School Feeding in South Africa: What we know, what we don't know, what we need to know, what we need to do*. Working paper for Food Security SA. Working Paper Series no. 004, 11 June. South Africa: DST-NRF Centre of Excellence in Food Security

Drake LJ, Lazrak N, Fernandes M, Chu K, Singh S, Ryckembusch D, Nourozi S, Bundy DAP and Burbano C (2020) Establishing global school feeding program targets: how many poor children globally should be prioritized, and what would be the cost of implementation? *Frontiers in Public Health* 8(530176): 1–10.

Droomer L, Cooper-Bell T, Linderboom S, Scholtz K and Besada D (2023) Implementation Strategies for Nutrition Support to Children in Early Learning Programmes. Report, Real Reform for ECD Right to Nutrition, South Africa, November.

Edkins J (1996) Legality with a Vengeance: Famines and Humanitarian Relief in "Complex Emergencies." *Millennium* 25(3): 547-575.

Engelbrecht P, Nel M, Nel N and Tlale D (2015) Enacting understanding of inclusion in complex contexts: classroom practices of South African teachers. *South African Journal of Education* 35(3): 1-10.

Food and Agriculture Organization (2005) Voluntary guidelines to support the progressive realization of the right to adequate food in the context of national food security. Report, 127th Session of the FAO Council, Italy, November.

Food and Agriculture Organization (2008) An introduction to the Basic Concepts of Food Security. Available at: https://www.fao.org/agrifood-economics/publications/detail/en/c/122386/ (accessed 26 August, 2024)

Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations (2022) Partnership to support AU's strategies on social protection, school feeding and rural youth employment. Available at: https://openknowledge.fao.org/items/6c504a1b-af2b-4751-a94c-3cd0d6970b10 (accessed 26 August 2024).

Ghana Statistical Service (2008). Population and Housing Census 2000. Available at: https://www2.statsghana.gov.gh/nada/index.php/catalog/3/data_dictionary (accessed 26 August, 2024)

Global Child Nutrition Foundation, 'School Meal Programs around the world, Results from the 2021 Golobal Survey of School Meal Programs.' Source: https://gcnf.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/School-Meal-Programs-Around-the-World-Results-from-the-2021-Global-Survey-of-School-Meal-Programs©.pdf (accessed: 26th August 2024).

Google maps (2019) Lokaleng village map. Available at: http://www.safariNow.com/default.aspx (accessed 11 October 2019).

Gran G (1986) *Ending hunger: An Idea Whose Time has come*. New York: Praeger Publications.

Grantham-McGregor S (2005) Can the Provision of Breakfast Benefit School Performance? *Food and Nutrition Bulletin Supplement* 2(26): 144-158.

Graziano da Silva J, Del Grossi ME and Galvão de França C (2011) *The Fome Zero (Zero Hunger) Program: The Brazilian experience*. Report for Ministry of Agrarian Development and FAO. NEAD Special Series No. 13. Brasilia: Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations.

Gunderson GW (2003) *The National School Lunch Programme: Background and Development*. Washington D.C.: Nova Publishers.

Howell KE (2013) *Introduction to philosophy of methodology*. London: Sage publisher.

Huth EJ, King K and Lock S (1988) Uniform requirements for manuscripts submitted to biomedical journals. *British Medical Journal* 296(4): 401–405.

Isaac MA (2021) In-school nutrition key to South Africa's alarming learner dropout rate. Available at: https://www.iol.co.za/news/education/in-school-nutrition-key-to-south-africas-alarming-learner-dropout-rate-bb5df837-c27d-485f-b1f1-cb4290b4954d#:~:text=A%20National%20Income%20Dynamic%20survey,the%20time%20of%20the%20study (accessed 26 August 2024).

Department of basic education (2021) National School Nutrition Program. Available at: https://www.education.gov.za/TheDBE/DBEStructure/SocialandSchoolEnrichment/NationalSchoolNutritionProgramme/tabid/131/Default.aspx (accessed 26 August 2024)

Jomaa LH, McDonnell E and Probart C (2011) School feeding programs in developing countries: impacts on children's health and educational outcomes. *Nutrition Reviews* 69(2): 83–98.

Kain J, Uauy R and Taibo M (2002) Chile's school feeding programme: targeting experience. *Nutrition Reviews* 9(22): 599–608

Kiyini, KR (2014) *Case Study Research, Design and Methods*. London: Sage Publication.

Langinger N (2011) School feeding programs in Kenya: transitioning to a homegrown approach. *Stanford Journal of International Relations* 13(1): 30–37.

LeCompte MD and Schensul JJ (1999) *Analysing and interpreting ethnographic data*. Walnut Creek: AltaMira Press.

Mafugu T (2021) Challenges encountered in a South African school nutrition programme. *Journal of Public Health Research* 10(1): 1-8.

Maijo SN (2018) Impact of school feeding programme on learners' academic performance in Mlunduzi Ward, Tanzania. *International Journal of Educational Studies* 5(2): 125–130

Mulaudzi L, Reyneke M and Gcelu N (2024) Evaluating the South African National School Nutrition Programme during school breaks against the core principles and the right to education under the Convention on the Rights of the Child. *Cogent Social Sciences* 10(1):1–17.

Manyamba C, Hendriks S, Chilonda P and Musaba E (2012) Factors contributing to inequalities in food security in South Africa: implications for agricultural policy. In: Strategies to overcome poverty & inequality: Towards Carnegie III, Cape Town, South Africa, 3-7.

Maree K (2011) *First steps in research*. Pretoria: Van Schaik.

Martens T (2007) Impact of Ghana School Feeding Programme in Four Districts in Central Region, Ghana. Masters Thesis, Wageningen University: Netherlands

McMillan JH and Schumacher S (2006) *Research in Education – Evidence-based Inquiry.* (6th Ed). Boston: Pearson Education Inc.

Mideksa S, Getachew T, Bogale F, Woldie E, Ararso D, Samuel A, Girma M, Tessema M and Hadis M (2024) School feeding in Ethiopia: a scoping review. *BMC Public Health* 24(138): 1–13.

Mohapanele K (2023) The impact of family structure and its dynamics on street children phenomenon in the North West province of South Africa. PhD Thesis, North West University, South Africa.

Morgan H (2014) *Guidelines of writing a literature review*. Glendale: Pyrczak publisher.

Mostert CM (2021) The impact of the school feeding programme on the education and health outcomes of South African children. *Children and Youth Services Review* 126(106029): 1-10.

Munje PN and Jita LC (2019) The implementation of the school feeding scheme (SFS) in South African public primary schools. *Educational Practice and Theory* 41(2): 25–42.

Department of Basic Education (2010) Nutrition Policy Guidelines: A guide to secondary schools. Available at: https://www.education.gov.za/Portals/0/DoE%20Branches/Social%20and%20School%20Enrichment/National%20School%20Nutrition%20Programme/NSNP%20Manual%20for%20Secondary%20schools.pdf?ver=2009-09-18-100844-887 (accessed 26 August 2024).

National School Nutrition Programme: https://www.education.gov.za/TheDBE/DBEStructure/SocialandSchoolEnrichment/NationalSchoolNutritionProgramme/tabid/131/Default.aspx (accessed: 29 March 2023).

New Partnership for Africa's Development (2022) AUDA-NEPAD Guidelines for the Design and Implementation of Home-Grown School Feeding Programmes in Africa. Available at: https://www.nepad.org/publication/guidelines-design-and-implementation-of-home-grown-school-feeding-programmes (accessed 2 May 2024).

Onyenweaku E and Kesa H (2023) The impact and challenges of South African school feeding programmes in the COVID-19 context. *International Journal of School Health* 10(4): 225–237.

Osmani S (1995) *The Entitlement Approach to Famine: Welfare and Development*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Patton MQ (1987) *How to Use Qualitative Methods in Evaluation*. London: Sage Publications.

Rammutla R (2021) Residents blockade roads in Moshawane and Lokaleng villages. Available at: https://themaftownian.wordpress.com/2021/05/14/residents-blockade-roads-in-moshawane-and-lokaleng-villages/ (accessed 5 August 2024).

Platt, J (1996) History of Sociological Research Methods in America: Psychology Press. London.

Pollitt E, Jacoby E and Cueto S (1996) School breakfast and cognition among nutritionally at-risk children in the Peruvian Andes. *Nutrition Reviews* 54(1): 22–26.

Pollitt E (1990) Malnutrition and infection in the classroom: summary and conclusions. *Food and Nutrition Bulletin* 12(3): 1–13.

Powell CA, Walker SP, Chang SM and Grantham-McGregor SM (1998) Nutrition and education: a randomized trial of the effects of breakfast in rural primary school children. *The American Journal of Clinical Nutrition* 68(4): 873–879.

Powell C, Grantham-McGregor SM and Elston M (1983) An evaluation of giving the Jamaican government school meal to a class of children. *Human Nutrition: Clinical Nutrition* 37(5): 381–388.

Rendall-Nkosi K, Wenhold F and Sibanda NB (2013). Case study of the national school nutrition programme in South Africa. Report for the Department of Basic Education, University of Pretoria, South Africa. Source: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/338037200_Case_Study_of_the_National_School_Nutrition_Programme_in_South_Africa (accessed: 26 August 2024).

Republic of South Africa (2000) Preferential Procurement Policy Framework Act no. 5 of 2000. Available at: https://www.gov.za/documents/acts/preferential-procurement-policy-framework-act-5-2000-03-feb-2000 (accessed 26 August 2024).

Sarracino F (2010). Explaining Famines: A Critical Review of Main Approaches and Further Causal Factors. International Working Paper series no 10/02, University of Pavia, Italy.

Sen AK (1981) Ingredients of famine analysis: availability and entitlements. *The Quarterly Journal of Economics* 96(8): 433–464.

Sen AK (1983) Development: which way now? *The Economic Journal* 93(372): 745–762.

Sen AK (1987) *The Standard of Living* (ed. Hawthorn G). Cambridge MA: Cambridge University Press

South African National Biodiversity Institute (2023) An initial assessment of impact on biodiversity from GMOs released into the environment in South Africa 2021. Available at: https://www.sanbi.org/news/sanbi-publishes-south-africas-first-report-on-the-impacts-of-gmos-on-biodiversity/#:~:text=GM%20cotton%2C%20soybean%20and%20maize,is%20greater%20than%2085%25%20GM. (accessed 22 July 2024).

Shuttleworth M (2014) *Explorative methods of data collection: writing methodology*. London: Macmillan.

Suessoy K (2013) *The case study as a research method*. Austin: University of Texas.

Taylor AD and Ogbogu CO (2016) The effects of school feeding programme on enrolment and performance of public elementary school pupils in Osun State, Nigeria. *World Journal of Education* 6(3): 39–47.

Tladi MJ (2019) The school feeding programme (personal interview). 27 April, Lokaleng Primary School Mafikeng.

Turner DW III (2010) Qualitative interview design: A practical guide for novice investigators. *The qualitative report*, 15(3): 754-760.

Tomlinson M (2007) School feeding in east and southern Africa: Improving food sovereignty or photo opportunity. Discussion paper for the Regional Network for Equity in Health in Southern Africa. Discussion paper no.46, 1 March. Zimbabwe: Regional Network for Equity in Health in Southern Africa. Source: https://www.equinetafrica.org/sites/default/files/uploads/documents/DIS46nutTOMLINSON.pdf

United Nations Development Programme (2006) *Beyond Scarcity: Power, Poverty and the Global Water Crisis*. New York: McMillan.

United Nations (2024) Peace Dignity and equality on a healthy planet. Available at: https://www.un.org/en/global-issues/children#:~:text=In%201959%2C%20the%20UN%20General,law%20related%20to%20children's%20rights (accessed: 26 August 2024).

United Nations Children's Fund (2024) The Convention on the Rights of the Child: The children's version. Available at: https://www.unicef.org/child-rights-convention/convention-text-childrens-version (accessed 19 July 2024).

Verguet S, Limasalle P, Chakrabarti A, Husain A, Burbano C, Drake L and Bundy DA (2020) The broader economic value of school feeding programs in low-and middle-income countries: estimating the multi-sectoral returns to public health, human capital, social protection, and the local economy. *Frontiers in Public Health* 8(587046): 1–9.

Vermeesch C and Kremer M (2004) School Meals, Eduational Achievement and School Competition: Evidence from a Randomized Evaluation. Available at: https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=667881 (accessed

26 August 2024).

Wadhwa D (2019) School Feeding programs are often pro-poor. In: World Bank blogs. Available at https://blogs.worldbank.org/opendata/school-feeding-programs-are-often-pro-poor (accessed 26 August 2024).

Wang D and Fawzi WW (2020) Impacts of school feeding on educational and health outcomes of school-age children and adolescents in low-and middle-income countries: protocol for a systematic review and meta-analysis. *Systematic Reviews* 9(55): 1–8.

Wellman JC, Kruger J and Mitchell K (2008) *Research methodology*. Cape Town: Oxford University Press.

World Bank (2015) *The State of Social Safety Nets 2015*. Washington, DC: World Bank. doi:10.1596/978-1-4648-0543-1.

World Food Programme. 2009. World Hunger Series: Hunger and Markets. London: Routledge .

World Health Organization. 2020. Basic Documents. Available at: https://apps.who.int/gb/bd/pdf_files/BD_49th-en.pdf#page=6 (accessed 17 May 2024).

World Bank. 2020. Poverty and Equity Brief: Sub-Saharan Africa. Available at: https://databankfiles.worldbank.org/public/ddpext_download/poverty/33EF03BB-9722-4AE2-ABC7-AA2972D68AFE/Global_POVEQ_ZAF.pdf (accessed 16 July 2024).

World Health Organization (2020) Healthy growth and development. Available at: https://www.who.int/teams/maternal-newborn-child-adolescent-health-and-ageing/child-health/healthy-growth-and-development (accessed 19 July 2024).

Yin RK (2009) *Case study research designs and methods*. California: Sage Publisher.

Food Movements Unite! ? Food sovereignty, the agrarian question, and the contours of organising from below in the South African food system

Paper first received: 08 December 2023; Accepted: 18 August 2024; Published in final form: 24 February 2025
https://doi.org/10.48416/ijsaf.v30i1.567

Andrew BENNIE [1, 2]

Abstract

Significant scholarly attention has been given to the global food sovereignty movement. However, the global movement is ultimately rooted in national and local contexts. The political dynamics of movements in such contexts call for ongoing exploration, especially as to how the global discourse and principles of food sovereignty take root politically and socially. This article therefore provides an account of the movement terrain of organising members of popular classes around food questions in South Africa, and with which food sovereignty as a global idea, practice and political project articulates. A typology shows that the civil society forms of organising around food and food system change fall between justice-centred and food-centred conceptions, and they cohere around lifestyle, organic, food justice and systemic politics. The article shows how the form and content of this food movement emerged through the particularities of a settler colonial society and the associated articulations between race, class, gender, and ecology. Based on this, I argue that these types, their content, and their politics have been shaped through the historical, conjunctural relationship between the agrarian question and the national question in South Africa, which can be understood through Stuart Hall's concept of articulation. This argument has wider implications for how we think about food movements in the South – the potential to understand them in relation to the particularities of agrarian change in post-colonial contexts, the associated patterns of class fragmentation, and politics, that have been historically engendered by underdevelopment, precarity, and subordinate relations to the global economy.

[1] Institute for Economic Justice (IEJ)
[2] University of the Witwatersrand

Corresponding authors: Andrew Bennie, andrew.bennie@iej.org.za

Biographical notes

Andrew Bennie is Senior Researcher in Climate Policy and Food Systems at the Institute for Economic Justice, South Africa, and a Research Associate with the Department of Sociology at University of the Witwatersrand. He has a PhD in Sociology from the University of the Witwatersrand.

Introduction

Food sovereignty has become the key rallying call of the global social movement La Via Campesina ('Way of the Peasant'), one of the world's largest global social movements that claims to represent about 200 million small-scale food producers worldwide (LVC, 2021). At a food sovereignty world assembly in Mali in 2007, the resulting Declaration of Nyéléni articulated what has become one of the most widely used definitions of food sovereignty. It elaborated on various principles of food sovereignty that have become widely seen as the key coordinates of advancing food sovereignty. These principles offer instruments to resist the spread of industrial agriculture and the corporate food regime, and to advance alternative food systems defined by rights to ecologically healthy food systems, culturally appropriate food, and decision-making power (Kesselman, 2017). Key in this conceptualisation of food sovereignty is the democratisation of, and strengthening social control over, the food system.

However, applying food sovereignty to the many dimensions and actors of the food system has not come without its analytical, political and concrete tensions. As an idea, mobilising frame, political project and discourse that has garnered extensive global attention is likely to do, food sovereignty has become a 'fundamentally contested concept' (Alonso-Fradejas et al., 2015: 433). It has thus inspired academic conferences, journal articles and special journal issues devoted to deepening and interrogating its dimensions. An important source of debate has emerged from agrarian political economy and reflects many ongoing debates in the field on agriculture, class (and class agency), politics, and capitalist development (Edelman et al., 2014). A prominent aspect of this debate revolves around the role that structural processes of class differentiation in agriculture under capitalism or political agency of subjects respectively play in hindering or advancing the possibilities of realising food sovereignty's ideals of resolving industrial agriculture's contradictions by replacing it with ecologically harmonious production through egalitarian social and economic relations.

This article seeks to contribute to further discussion on approaching and understanding food sovereignty politics and organising in the Global South, and proposes that southern agrarian questions (McMichael, 1997; Moyo, Jha and Yeros, 2013) can be an important lens through which to do so. In the context of the global movement politics of food sovereignty as a response to the socio-ecological crisis-inducing global food regime, I examine the nature of the organised food movement in a particular post-colonial context of the Global South: South Africa. The dynamics of transnational agrarian and food sovereignty movements have been well analysed (Borras et al., 2008; McMichael, 2014). However, the global food sovereignty movement emerged from particular national political settings and movements, such as the Brazilian Landless Rural Workers Movement (MST). As the coverage of transnational movements by Borras et al. (2008) and Voss and Williams (2012) point to, ongoing attention to the localised dynamics and contents of movement building, where movements are ultimately rooted and constituted, remains relevant in terms of understanding the dynamics of food movements and food sovereignty in concrete contexts of agrarian change.

The article paints a picture of the 'food movement' in South Africa in terms of civil society organising on the issue, and which is the terrain with which the global food sovereignty discourse, practice, and politics has articulated to shape the nature of food sovereignty organising in the country. That is, actual food sovereignty organising in South Africa reflects not just the organising principles that are core to activists' understanding of food sovereignty, such as the six principles outlined in the Nyeleni Declaration (2007). They also reflect longer historical forms of organising oppressed people during colonialism and apartheid, and the varying political articulations of race, class, gender and ecology that such organising happened through. A typology shows that the array of organising around food and the food system can be categorised by variables of justice-centred and food-centred conceptions of change in the food system, and that they cohere around *lifestyle*, *organic*, *food justice* and *systemic* politics. These categories can be identified in other social contexts as well. However, there is some particularity in their historical construction, content and social relationships in a context like South Africa, that have been shaped through the particular race-class dynamics of its racial

capitalism, acutely theorised by Stuart Hall (1980). I argue that in this context a key element to understanding the constitution of the food movement in South Africa is its historical relations with the intersecting national and agrarian questions, which can be understood through the concept of articulation.

A wealth of social and food movement literature has examined movement formation and action through concepts such as repertoires of action, framing, and opportunity structure (Tarrow, 1993; Tilly and Tarrow, 2015; Zentgraf and Kalix Garcia, 2024). However, in light of Stuart Hall's approach to conjunctural analysis (Featherstone, 2017), the article's focus is instead to situate the types in the historical processes and social relations that came together to produce them, particularly in relation to the intersecting national and agrarian questions. My approach to the agrarian question reflects a critical agrarian political economy framework that has principally been concerned with the relationship between agriculture and capitalism, the class relations within agriculture, and the associated politics arising out of the agrarian question (Cousins, 2013; Bernstein, 2010). The national question was broadly about overcoming the combination of racial oppression and class exploitation under South African colonialism and apartheid, where the country's accumulation model was based on the super-exploitation of the Black majority's labour and their political repression (Drew, 1996). Key to this process was the agrarian question, which proceeded through creating the conditions for accumulation in agriculture under white control, through racialised land dispossession, the simultaneous reliance on agriculture for survival on diminished land that was left for the Black majority, and the development of a large-scale and highly commercialised, white-controlled agricultural and food system.

A key political task of the national liberation movement was thus to 'resolve' the national question through winning the struggle for democracy and to ensure the socio-economic redress and upliftment of the country's majority through the pursuit of equality. However, for those like Jara (2013: 267), the national question remains 'unresolved', seen in the post-1994 adoption of neoliberal economic policies by the ruling African National Congress (ANC) that stifled more deeply addressing the racialised patterns of poverty and class inequality. As such, South Africa is today considered the most unequal country in the world, and this inequality retains a strong racial pattern (World Bank, 2022; Chatterjee et al., 2023). This is reflected in the country's agrarian structure. Liberalisation, de-regulation, and a lack-lustre agrarian reform programme have left intact or reinforced many historical inequalities in land ownership, access to resources, and farming, the conditions of work across the agro-food system, and has seen ongoing corporate consolidation and control (Greenberg, 2015; Hodge et al., 2021). Furthermore, alongside this highly productive and 'modern' commercial system South Africa experiences high levels of food insecurity and malnutrition: around 60% of households experience some form of food insecurity and 65% cannot afford a healthy diet (Simelane et al., 2023; FAO et al., 2022). As we will see, the agrarian question has historically been and remains an important condition for food movement organising in South Africa in the vein of food sovereignty.

The article proceeds as follows. The second section elaborates on the theoretical framework with which the article engages and through which to approach the movement relationship between the agrarian question and food sovereignty in South Africa. The article is theoretically situated in agrarian political economy, which is concerned with the relations between agriculture, class and capitalist development. It is within this literature that much of the debate on food sovereignty has taken place. I adopt a materialist analysis consistent with such an approach, but combine it with the necessity of politically specific analysis through the notion of articulation developed by Stuart Hall (1980; 1996a). Articulation is an important tool in conjunctural analysis, which I suggest is key to understanding the historical, relational and politically fluid nature of today's movement, which can be understood as developing through processes of articulation. The fourth section describes the methods used to investigate the food movement in this context, which is presented in the fifth section. The sixth section discusses how this food movement has historically been shaped by the forces of the agrarian question and politically specific articulations of class, race, and national liberation politics. I conclude with the necessity to situate food sovereignty politics and movement organising in the South, such as in sub-Saharan Africa, within national histories of the agrarian question, the political traditions that have emerged,

and the kinds of articulations that take place today amidst the contradictions of insertion into a neoliberal and unequal world economy. This may be useful for a fuller understanding of food sovereignty politics and its potentials, at national and transnational levels.

Theoretical Framework – The Agrarian Question and Food Sovereignty

Food sovereignty has reignited debates on agrarian change and the agrarian question (see Edelman et al., 2014; Shattuck et al., 2015; Alonso-Fredjas et al., 2015). Much historical thinking on the agrarian question has principally been concerned with issues around the development of agriculture in capitalist societies and associated class relations. One of its principal early theorists, Karl Kautsky, thus defined the agrarian question as, 'is capital, and in what ways is capital, taking hold of agriculture, revolutionising it, smashing the old forms of production and of poverty and establishing the new forms which must succeed?' (quoted in Akram-Lodhi, 1998:135). In this sense, Bernstein (1996) identified three inter-connected problematics that have characterised the classical agrarian question. The first is that of accumulation, relating to the role of agriculture in generating surplus resources for industrialisation and structural transformation. The second problematic can be termed one of production, concerned with the extent to which capitalist class relations have developed in the countryside. The third is concerned with politics, the political forces and processes that the accumulation and production problematics gave rise to (Akram-Lodhi, 1998). As a result, Bernstein (2006) terms the classical agrarian question as one of capital. Key in these approaches to the agrarian question is the inevitable tendency of rural class differentiation and its attendant implications for politics.

Bernstein's classification of the classical agrarian question as one of capital is largely a preface to his argument that under current conditions of capitalist globalisation, much of the South is today instead confronted by the agrarian question of labour (Bernstein, 2006). That is, the agrarian question is no longer one of capital as under contemporary conditions of globalisation industrialisation does not necessarily require capitalist development in agriculture. Rather, there is a global fragmented class of labour – the precariat, the informal working class, petty commodity producers – that is rendered surplus to the accumulation needs of capital. It is thus the intensified reproductive crisis of labour and, consequently, how to secure social reproduction for classes of labour, and the consequent role that land may play in this, that for Bernstein (2006) constitutes the agrarian question today.

This conception has generated much debate and critique in agrarian theory, including that it simplifies the relationship between agriculture and capitalist development in the South, it remains capital-centric rather than appreciative of the multiple forces shaping rural livelihoods and economies, and does not appreciate the symbiotic relationships between capital and labour (Hendricks, 2014; Dasgupta, 2021; Murisa and Helliker, 2011). Its framing has also become an important pillar of debate on food sovereignty, such as between Bernstein and the prominent food sovereignty advocate, Phillip McMichael (Bernstein, 2014, 2016; McMichael, 2014, 2016). In many senses, the debates encompass varying positions long existent in the literature on the agrarian question on the nature of agrarian change and its relation to capitalism. In particular, they include the relationships between agents of change and structural class determinants, class formation and its relationships to ecological crisis and political organisation, and the implications of fragmentation of classes of labour for politics and agrarian change. Some see much of this debate as seemingly displaying a mutually exclusive emphasis on agency and structure respectively (Akram-Lodhi, 2021). Yet a key actor in the debate who focuses strongly on political agency, McMichael (2014), argues that the peasant is a political rather than analytical category that is actively constituted by the terrain and lines of struggle in particular contexts. Both assertions point us to concretely understanding the nature of agency and resistance in situated and contextual ways.

One attempt to understand agrarian agency in politically specific and contextual ways, from a southern perspective, is by Moyo et al. (2013). They situate the dynamics of the agrarian question, in former settler

colonies in particular, in relation to the politics of national liberation. They argue that the notion that the agrarian question of capital is resolved, based on the reduction of the question to industrialisation, is based on a particular European experience. Rather, given disarticulated forms of development and underdevelopment during and after colonialism, the agrarian question remains relevant and unresolved, and for countries like many in Africa is one of national sovereignty in relation to capital – the agrarian question of national liberation. Land and agrarian reform thus remain central to democratised forms of national development. They emphasise the role of rural social forces in contesting economic subordination in the global economy and capital centric economic policies that limit the gains of national liberation. This also raises questions about the national political relations that these dynamics occur through. Whereas scholars like Bernstein have tended to treat the conditions creating fragmented classes of labour as an accomplished fact, for Moyo et al. (2013) it is precisely those constraining conditions that are the object of political agency, and on which transforming those conditions is contingent.

Key in these debates on the agrarian question are therefore the roles of, and relationships between, structural agrarian constraints and political agency in the context of the national question. I suggest that beyond only their argument about national liberation, an important implication of Moyo et al.'s approach is that it reflects an attempt to deepen a relational analysis that asks us to situate agency and movements in historically, politically, and contextually specific ways, rather than reading their potentials and significance off structural constraints. This means that, in placing the emergence of the South African food movement from the agrarian question, 'trajectories of agrarian change are not a story foretold, but the product of multiple and dynamic politics' (Alonso-Fradejas 2015: 493). This points to the conjunctural and contingent nature of the food movement's emergence from particular agentic engagements with the structural features of the country's agrarian and national questions.

Articulation provides a methodological and conceptual tool through which to undertake conjunctural and dialectical analysis of multiple determinations. I use articulation as developed by the Gramscian theorist Stuart Hall. The concept was initially developed in the South African context in a seminal article by Harold Wolpe (1972), as a way to understand the relationship between 'pre-capitalist' modes of production and the development of industrial capitalism in South Africa. While making a critical contribution, Wolpe was also criticised for his functionalist, mechanical, and overly structural readings of such articulation (Friedman, 2015). Hall thus further sophisticated the concept through a Gramscian frame. Antonio Gramsci's focus on hegemony in analysis of capitalism and social phenomena was grounded in the need for historical specificity, which meant treating objects of analysis as 'historical articulations' (Hall, 1980). As explained by Stuart Hall (1996a), a Gramscian analysis therefore means moving beyond a reductionist approach that reads off political developments from their economic determinations, to incorporating analysis of the 'mediations' structuring the relationships between the economic foundations and the actual phenomena and processes shaping social reality in a particular instance. This includes unpacking the role of agency in any particular conjuncture, and the forces shaping it, as part of how social phenomena, including class, are actively constructed, so producing 'a "unity" out of difference' (Hall, 1991: 136).

The concept of articulation is a way to undertake historically specific analysis, and to understand this 'unity' as constructed by dialectical forces and as a product of multiple determinations – material, ideological, subjective, and political. Hall's (1980: 329) elaboration of the concept of articulation partly reflects notions of 'joining up' and 'giving expression to', beyond simply juxtaposition. Articulation can be used in the sense of the combination of relations and structures into a 'complex unity' that is dynamic and overdetermined, in the sense that the unity is not simply the sum of its components. In this sense, processes of articulation are generative of social structure and realities. This includes the production of collective political action and mobilisation through the intersections of various elements like history, class, gender, race, and culture and subjectivity (Levenson, 2022).

Key in the formation of movements is the 'common sense' they organise around. Further to his Gramscian approach, one of Hall's key contributions was also to bring culture more strongly into class analysis, in the context of ideology and hegemony, and building counter-hegemony. Culture can refer to the system of shared meaning through which people make sense of the world, and therefore act on it. In this sense it is therefore critical in shaping subjectivity, and it is powerfully shaped by ideology – 'the ways in which ideas of different kinds grip the minds of the masses' (Hall, 1996b: 26) and so constructs the 'common sense' (Hall, 1996a). Ideology can play a role in stabilising a system of power and domination, but it also entails processes through which new forms of consciousness are developed and that can organise concrete action against oppressive systems (Hall, 1996a). In this light, varying ideological and political responses can be developed to similar material problems, including those that historically formed the types constituting today's food movement in South Africa. This also allows us to see how in the food movement ideological and cultural dimensions have historically shaped varying practices in response to concrete situations – such as methods of farming, organising, and the political orientation of such organising.

A class analysis of the food movement through the conceptual frame of articulation and conjunctural analysis may help view the streams constituting it as particular 'historical articulations' of social groups, material conditions (including ecological ones of soil degradation and drought), and cultural and political outlooks that underpinned them, in the context of the national and agrarian questions. This will be unpacked further, after a brief description of the methods used to investigate the South African food movement.

Data and Methods

To uncover the various components that have articulated to produce the food movement, the research focused on the historical contexts that they emerged and evolved through, the histories of the initiatives, the political motivations behind them, the social groups that drove the initiatives and that articulated around them respectively, the central issues that they organised and currently organise around, the tactics and modes of organising, and the involved actors' comprehensions of their context and work (their 'common sense'). The research took place over a roughly 3-year period between 2015-2018, which examined 36 initiatives across six of South Africa's nine provinces (Gauteng, Limpopo, KwaZulu-Natal, Eastern Cape, Western Cape and Northern Cape). This covered initiatives operating in rural as well as in urban areas – due to South Africa's model of uneven development and semi-proletarianisation, the agrarian question pervades both the rural and the urban (Jacobs, 2018). My sampling approach started from my initial knowledge of initiatives to target, which was based on my prior involvement in activist food networks, while I also connected with further initiatives as I came to know of them through the research process. I aimed to examine and engage with a cross section of initiatives that organised in different parts of the country, different social groups, and around different issues related to food and the food system.

A number of methods of investigation were then employed. Extensive engagement of secondary literature on the history of the agrarian question, food, and resistance informed an understanding of the historical context of the emergence of the segments of the South African food movement and of its actors, including the material conditions they were responding to, and information on the initiatives themselves. Primary data was also gathered, including through analysis of historical documents, accessed through archives, online, and through interview subjects. These played an important role in understanding the historical roots and the ideological and political motivations (the common sense) that shaped how they understood the problem they sought to address, the solutions, and the actors they sought to organise. I also undertook 26 interviews with key informants, who included researchers and scholar-activists knowledgeable on agrarian, food and movement issues, and those situated at important vantage points such as in NGOs active on land, food, or agrarian issues. These provided further data on the historical and political contexts of the initiatives under study and an insight into some of internal dynamics of movement building that occurred after 1994.

I also conducted 52 in-depth interviews with participants across the different categories identified as comprising the food movement. Participant observation allowed me to build a more complete and dynamic picture of the initiatives I studied through more sustained engagement (Robson and McCarton, 2016). This involved more 'passive' forms of observations in the field, as well as participant observation through my participation in events like annual general meetings (AGMs), becoming a member of a Participatory Guarantee System (PGS) group and so attending organic farm assessment visits, and participating in direct actions such as marches by the movements or campaigns I was studying. This participant observation overlapped with my own years of activism and involvement in the food movement since 2011. Lastly, I undertook extensive analysis of primary organisational documents like information booklets, strategy and planning documents, reports, and press statements. Thematic analysis of the data was then conducted through Nvivo to identify the historical roots and the problems the movements responded to, the social relationships through which they developed, their political comprehension of the material context, practical solutions advanced, forms of organising, and changes over time. These methods of primary data gathering allowed for developing an insight into the current terrain of formal organising around food system change and of the types constituting it as historical articulations, the social relations they developed through, and the class, racial, ideological and political mediations that have shaped them.

Findings – A Typology of the Food Movement in South Africa

South Africa's largely corporate-controlled food system has been characterised as 'unjust, unsustainable, unsafe, and unkind' (Cock, 2016: 4). Patterns of inequality, employment precarity, and food insecurity in the food system reflect also the wider inequalities of South African society, and the injustices underpinning them. These are some of the contextual features within which we can situate the various streams of the food movement and how they relate to them.

The first level of findings is that the food movement can be broadly divided into organisations and initiatives that start from a food-centred and justice-centred perspective respectively. In short, in food-centred approaches, the starting point is the outcomes of the industrial food system in terms of food's quality, health aspects and the environmental impacts of its production. These concerns are elaborated across different class and social contexts to produce particular configurations. Food-centred approaches can focus on both better-off and poorer communities, although not necessarily from the standpoint of justice. Questions of social justice can be present, but tend to be understood largely in ameliorative terms and as an 'additive property' (Figueroa, 2015: 502).

Justice-centred also shares these concerns about the industrial food system but, in the context of South Africa's social inequality, they are refracted through a central emphasis on rights of popular classes, and so their framing agenda tends to be on social and distributional inequalities, the race, class and gender implications of food system injustices, and the rights and struggles of farm workers and dwellers. The starting point for those towards the justice-centred axis is therefore the needs and rights of the poor and marginalised and challenging the social relations that induce deprivation, including corporate power, and through which attempts to advance resistance to the industrial food system is refracted. An important structuring dynamic of conceptions of justice here have been histories of various national liberation traditions that have connected to struggles on the ground that are shaped by the social and economic contradictions of post-apartheid South Africa. The meanings of justice in relation to food are thus closely tied to contesting the patterns of class, racial and gender inequality forged under national oppression, and intensified in various ways by economic forces after liberation.

The distinction between food-centred and justice-centred reflects how, while 'objective' food system contradictions may be commonly recognised, approaches to addressing them are refracted through varying concrete interests, class positions, and cultural and political lenses (Figueroa, 2015). Figure 1 presents a

typology depicting a framework for understanding the food movement in South Africa. The key axis is between food-centred and justice-centred approaches. When combined with the second axis of an emphases on either consumption or production as the locus of action/protest, we see four particular configurations of mobilisation identifiable in the South African context. Indeed, consumption and production are in reality linked in multiple ways. How the initiatives and organisations conceptualise consumption and production, and their implications, in interaction with a food- or a justice-centred conception of a food system, produces broad configurations that I have categorised as *lifestyle*, *organic*, *food justice*, and *systemic*.

The axes of the typology are also relational in that in reality there are inter-relations between initiatives in them, such as the produce from small township farmers in the *organic* category supplying elite consumption in the *lifestyle* category. The positions of the organisations and movements in the typology are also not static: where they are positioned may depend on the historical period (they may shift over time), the issue at stake, or the network relationships they are acting through at a particular time. There can also be overlaps between initiatives in different categories. For example, some from *organic* and *systemic* may both promote and support similar sorts of farming methods at the technical level, and rather are distinguished by how they approach questions of distribution, politics and power. The initiatives and movements in each category can therefore be seen as historically specific configurations that exist, and can shift between, categories – as 'historical articulations' (Hall, 1980). As such, particular initiatives, organisations or movements tend to exist within a network, often as nodal points that bring together various historically patterned tendencies. As the next section will show, their histories are also interconnected.

Figure 1: Typology of the food movement in South Africa

	Food-centred (Ameliorative)	**Justice-centred (Systemic)**
Consumption	Lifestyle • 'Clean' food • Authenticity • Local • 'Foodies' • Bring supermarkets on board • Politics: individual consumption – vote with forks • Examples: niche food stores and restaurants, sections of Slow Food	Food Justice • Ensure capacity of poor to access nutritious food baskets • Linkages made: social justice organisations • Politics: regulation for social and environmental justice; explore critical social questions through food • Examples: ACB and Biowatch anti-GMO campaigns; PACSA – increase social grants to help poor cope with food price increases; coalition to confront bread price fixing (Black Sash, COSATU, Children's Resource Centre *et al*)
Production	Organic • Soil and nutritional health • Entrepreneurialism and livelihoods (food security through sustainable agriculture) • Greening of food system • Individual innovations aggregated into change – 'pioneers' • Organise actors around market change • Politics: regulation to grow market sector • Linkages made: other food-related organisations • Examples: South African Organic Sector Organisation (SAOSO); PGS; Siyavuna; sections of Slow Food	Systemic • Food sovereignty linked to distributional demands, rights, entitlements: agrarian reform, land, housing • Movement power to contest power relations • Politics: Change social relations, hence class-based organising • Linkages made: socio-economic issues • Examples: Agrarian Reform for Food Sovereignty Campaign (FSC); Inyanda National Land Movement; SA Food Sovereignty Campaign (SAFSC); Rural Women's Assembly; Tshintsha Amakhaya; anti-extractivist struggles intersecting with agriculture

Type 1: Lifestyle – Food-centred Consumption

Initiatives and actions in the *lifestyle* type exhibit an emphasis on the food itself, with the key activity being

that of consumption as the means to achieve desired outcomes. It is largely a lifestyle approach that pays little attention to concerted collective effort for social change. The prime subjective motivation for actors is eating, transforming and enjoying (mainly organic) food. 'Local' is thus prominent in this sphere's cultural and practical repertoire, but tends to carry little social justice concern. The sphere's main material grounding is circuits of consumption composed of restaurants serving organic produce and grass-fed meat, niche food shops, artisanal bakeries, and initiatives that build a closer relation between producers and consumers than the industrial food system, like farmers markets and organic box schemes.[1] Their main social agents are the health-conscious middle class, chefs, 'hipsters', 'foodies' and food critics. This modality exhibits what are in themselves important elements of a sustainable food system, but they are embedded in middle and upper-middle class circuits of consumption with participation largely dependent on financial means, and with little connection to social justice. As Ledger (2016: 185) writes of such initiatives in South Africa:

> *[M]any of the people who shop at the new organic food stores and farmers' markets in South Africa are looking for 'alternative' food; that is, certified organic, free from chemical additives and produced in an environmentally friendly and/or humane way… But there may be nothing 'solidarity' about these alternative networks at all. In fact, there is not, particularly in South Africa. My research suggested that the majority of people who shop at organic stores have little or no interest in social justice or the welfare of farmworkers, or the fairness of the food system or how their purchases might contribute to any of these goals.*

These *lifestyle* approaches therefore contribute to developing food system patterns and relationships that are alternative to the industrial food system, but through existing class relations. They may also link with an aspect in the *organic* sphere, to small farmers from poor communities as producers who are linked into niche consumption driven by desires for wholesome, nutritious and 'clean' food, such as Harvest of Hope, which operates in townships on the Cape Flats.[2]

Type 2: Organic – Food-centred Production

The networks and organisations operating under the *organic* type historically emerge from a production perspective, with an overriding concern with the health of the soil linked to agriculture, which evolved into an ecological critique of the industrial food system and so efforts to elaborate sustainable methods of food production. As such, those under this type reflect various efforts of practising what has broadly been termed sustainable agriculture. The *organic* category has historically been constituted through intersecting agency rooted in, broadly, two class and race contexts. Firstly, by the (white) middle class seeking to forge alternative environmental and spiritual lifestyles. This group emphasised a 'pioneer' approach to change that rests on the aggregation of individual innovations and entrepreneurial action. Secondly, organic methods of production in South Africa have also developed in concert with longer historical efforts to ameliorate soil degradation, hunger and malnutrition in poor rural and urban communities through ecologically centred community and household food production. In poorer communities in the Global North, notions of food justice have linked community agriculture to wider efforts to confront systemic economic and racial inequalities (Battersby, 2013). Here, however, the organic movement in poor communities has been organised as a more instrumental response to key outcomes of the historically engineered social reproduction crisis in poor black communities – hunger and malnutrition (*ibid*). Thus it partly reflects the historical ideological foundations of organic that were rooted in paternalist responses to the effects of racial oppression. This has largely taken the form of livelihoods development approaches, in which organic food production is positioned as a means to address the consumption challenges of malnutrition and hunger.

These organic livelihood approaches have historical origins as welfare interventions in sites of poverty, but also evolved into the social economy practices during the post-apartheid era that seek to eliminate poverty through entrepreneurship and market inclusion (Williams, 2014). As the manager of a small-scale sustainable agriculture support organisation in KwaZulu-Natal Province explained of the initiative:

[1] For example, www.munchingmongoose.co.za; www.wensleydale.co.za.
[2] https://abalimiharvestofhope.org.za

> *[The] programme identified one of the key barriers to get income earning potential as distance from markets, not necessarily having transport, not necessarily having the entrepreneurial skills to be able to go out into more urban markets and market. So we've built a whole marketing side to the programme that is farmer-owned… (Siyavuna1, interview, 2016).*

A key ideological thread of this *organic* sphere that ties together middle- and working-class actors is thus that of advancing a combination of ameliorative and entrepreneurial actions as alternatives to the industrial food system's ecological and nutritional contradictions. The key approach is thus to expand the private sector around organic, through (social) entrepreneurship; to organise actors around market change, with technical frameworks, standards and policies as foremost mechanisms to advance change in the food system – a 'common sense' reflecting an articulation of desires for clean food with needs for developmental inclusion in the post-apartheid market economy.

A key organisation that is building bridges between Types 1 and 2 is the South African Organic Sector Organisation (SAOSO). SAOSO emerged out of the historical efforts of 'pioneers' in the organic sector, but now also includes elements from the *lifestyle* category. In the 2020s, it is playing a role of consolidating economic and social linkages between organic production and (elite) consumption articulated around their vision of a healthy food system. As the coordinator of SAOSO explained:

> *So there is the elite organic market, but then there's the clean food market at the bottom that has to grow. We have got to get all the people selling on the road, all of the people selling in the townships, all of the people selling to their communities, they've got to be selling clean food. So for me organic is, everything has to be based on those organic standards. Even PGS [Participatory Guarantee Systems] is based on those organic standards (SAOSO1, interview, 2017).*

There are also organisations and movements that focus on resource distribution, labour conditions and wages, and social policy, as key elements to address the inequitable nutritional outcomes of the current food system, in the vein of food justice.

Type 3: Food Justice – Justice-centred Consumption

The term *food justice* emanates from the United States context, largely as a response to institutionally racist development patterns and the resulting inordinate prevalence of food insecurity in poorer communities of colour linked to limited consumption options (Holt-Giménez and Wang, 2011), and has also extended to campaigns to improve farmworkers' wages and working conditions (Alkon, 2013). The term is scantily used in the South African context, perhaps partly due to the prevalence of household and community food production being advanced as more instrumental responses to food insecurity (see Battersby, 2013). However, there have been initiatives and struggles that reflect a food justice approach by focusing on the food system and consumption through elements of distributional justice, class and race.

Three variations to the *food justice* approach in South Africa can be identified. First, campaigning has occurred around the impacts of the dominant food system on the consumption capabilities and patterns of poor and working-class households in the context of low wages, social grants, and high unemployment levels. This included organisations like Pietermaritzburg Agency for Community Social Action (PACSA),[3] which undertook community organising but also monitored prices and associated dynamics in the food system. They called for shifts in the distributional regime (the necessity to increase wages and social grants) so as to better enable poor households to access nutritious food baskets, arising from the acknowledgement that '[t]he racial structure of our labour market and wage levels has not been transformed (PACSA, 2017: 1). It also included work to confront corporate power in the food system and its effects on health and nutrition. While some organisations continually lobby around particular issues (e.g., GMOs and biotechnology, the constitutional right to healthy food, water and environment and its implications for confronting corporate power), alliances

[3] PACSA closed doors and Pietermaritzburg Economic Justice and Dignity (PMBEJD) was subsequently established, which conducts similar work to which PACSA did.

and campaigns have tended to be temporary. Mobilisation was typically instigated by egregious instances of injustice and exploitation by powerful corporate actors.

Second, there have been efforts that start with food consumption – its nutritional quality, aesthetics, and enjoyment – but lean towards justice as activists use food to forge connections across class, race and space so to explore questions of justice, nutrition, art, human relations, and (de)colonisation (Rousell, interview, 2017). In many ways, they engage with food in similar tangible ways as the *lifestyle* sphere, but they shied away from its perceived class and racial exclusivity. For example in 2016, young Slow Food activists who were frustrated by what they saw as Slow Food South Africa's class and racially narrow purview established the Slow Food Youth Network. As one activist described of its formation:

> *…because Cape Town[4] is cliquey and small, when we started this whole thing [Slow Food South Africa] food was only about money and food was about nutrition and food was very fancy and elite and whatever. And when we realised that we needed to open that up – because we're so sensitive to whiteness down here, because it's a city that's built on segregation – we decided we needed to start inspiring so much more around food than Slow Food (SFYN 1, interview, 2017).*

This network took a different approach to organising activities that subjectively engaged with food in ways more reflective of wider material realities and appropriate to particular racial and class contexts.

A third aspect to *food justice* organising around consumption relates to farm- and food service-worker justice, in two respects. The first is organising over wages and working conditions, pointing to improved wages as essential for addressing the food insecurity that prevails among farm workers (Louw, interview, 2016; Ledger, 2016). Particularly in the Western Cape Province, where the Commercial, Stevedoring, Agricultural and Allied Workers Union (CSAAWU) operates, such conditions of farmworkers is prominently framed through race. A large platform of the Unions' work is to highlight the racially oppressive labour relations and lack of respect[5] as farm work is still primarily experienced and understood through paternalistic and often oppressive relationships between Coloured[6] and Black workers and white farmers (Wilderman, 2015). This aspect has also included some mobilising amongst workers in other parts of the food chain, such as in processing and retail, who are afflicted by precarious work, outsourcing, low wages, and exclusion from union organisation (for example, see Dor, 2017; VoC News, 2019).

Type 3: Systemic – Justice-centred Production

Consumption has also been a focus of organising for worker justice through an appeal to consumers as members of the food system. An example is the campaign by CSAAWU and supporting organisations to boycott the wines of Robertson Winery, which extended to Norway and Sweden through transnational trade union cooperation.[7] Such justice-oriented approaches to farm and food worker organising still exist, albeit somewhat on the margins. For example, farm worker organising by the labour movement has historically been weak. A key reason is that the nature of commercial farms makes linking with workers notoriously difficult, reflected in the fact that only about 10% of farm workers are unionised, and in the intensified precariousness of farm labour (TCOE, 2016). Much of this organising that links with critiques of the food system and rural social relations is being advanced outside of the traditional labour movement, linked to organisations from the *systemic* type like TCOE, Surplus Peoples Project (SPP), Women on Farms Project (WFP) and the Eastern Cape Agricultural Research Project (ECARP). Farm worker organising has thus also related to the *systemic* sphere, as their living and working conditions are grounded in a critique of the production structure and distributional regime governing food systems.

[4] South Africa's first colonial city.

[5] Lack of respect shown by farm owners towards workers is a common refrain by workers in the Western Cape, which is indicative of the racialised patterns of domination on commercial farms.

[6] Coloured is an official racial classification in South Africa, referring to people of mixed-race heritage.

[7] See CSAAWU (2017); Amandla! (2017).

In the *systemic* configuration, I refer to organisations that ground their perspectives and actions in justice, by centring land, food, access to natural resources, housing and gender justice as rights and entitlements of the poor and marginalised. These organisations recognise the undermining of these rights by the dominant agrarian and food production structures. They thus organise members of marginalised communities around alternative food and agrarian production methods (principally agroecology), and link it to confronting the wider justice-related issues facing communities, linked to key features of the agrarian question. As with the livelihoods development approach in the *organic* type, they also aim for sustainable livelihoods, but see the restoration of the land and access to natural resources that were lost under colonialism and apartheid and the need to dismantle the neoliberal structure of the South African economy as necessary conditions for building those sustainable livelihoods. Here the notion of food sovereignty is not only related to the contradictions of the industrial food system itself, but is grounded in the problems of landlessness, land rights and agrarian reform, inequality, rural democracy and gender justice that need to be fixed by pushing for structural change, especially through a new agrarian reform. For example, the Inyanda National Land Movement (2015: 40) argues that food sovereignty 'cannot be separated from pro-poor agrarian transformation' and envisions

> *an alternative people's agrarian system that is based on the equitable ownership of land and natural resources, ecological sustainability, agro-ecological production, and the democratic ownership and control of production, the input system, processing, distribution and marketing (2015: 35).*

This is closely aligned with La Via Campesina's framing of food sovereignty (see Giménez and Shattuck, 2011; Patel, 2010). In this *systemic* sphere, food sovereignty is thus ideologically informed by class-based distributive perspectives, whereby the achievement of entitlements is linked with structural shifts in class and power relations. The prominent form in this sphere is the NGO-movement/community relation. As will be discussed in the next section, the NGOs predominantly emerge from anti-apartheid currents and position themselves as supporting the creation of movement and community agency.

*****

Lifestyle, *organic*, *food justice* and *systemic* therefore constitute the differentiated terrain of a national food movement, and with which the global idea of food sovereignty has been formally articulated in the South African context. Thus, food sovereignty frames the actions in the different types, but different aspects may be emphasised. Although actors in the *systemic* current were the first to connect with the global food sovereignty movement and bring the discourse into organising in the country, the other spheres have reinforced their connections and overtime have begun to utilise the term as well. In other words, approaches to and meanings of food sovereignty in South Africa are shaped by the varied historical trajectories, political practices, class relationships and 'common sense' that each of the types reflect. Food sovereignty has therefore not been elaborated in a uniform way. For example, given the history of those in the organic stream, organisations like SAOSO largely associate food sovereignty with a food system based on ecological production methods, achieved within the existing economic, political and distributional framework. Such organisations are of course grounded in social concerns, but those in the systemic stream tend to express a more expansive, counter-hegemonic notion of food sovereignty that has been articulated with a desire to challenge the limits of national liberation, imposed largely by capital-centric macroeconomic policy. For example, the Inyanda National Land Movement (2015: 40) argues that food sovereignty "cannot be separated from pro-poor agrarian transformation." Such organisations thus promote agroecology in similar practical terms as the organic stream, but try to link this with an emphasis on political claim-making through mass, class-based mobilisation and organisation.

However, there are also overlaps among the four types of movements outlined above, such as in their technical practices of agroecology, seed saving, and biodiverse production systems, which confirm them as relational types. Each movements' actions are filtered through and aligned with varying political currents and ideological underpinnings that have longer histories rooted in the politics of South Africa's national question.

I therefore now turn to discussing the types (*organic* and *systemic* in particular) as articulatory outcomes of varying historical political responses to dispossession and underdevelopment that resulted from structural processes of agrarian and ecological change.

Discussion – Historical Articulations with the Agrarian and National Questions

The four types discussed in the findings that constitute the food movement in South Africa display discrete characteristics by which it is possible to categorise them. However, they must be seen as products of historical and contemporary processes of articulation between the national and agrarian questions, ecology, class, race, gender, and political agency. As 'articulatory practices' (Hart, 2002: 32) they are not simply the result of the static intersection of these factors, but can also be generative of social practices and realities. Here social practice can be understood as composed of an act (such as a particular way of farming) that takes place amidst material arrangements, is shaped by those material arrangements, but can also in turn shape material arrangements. These acts are also shaped by the actors' understandings of those material arrangements (Shatzki, 2010; Shove and Walker, 2014). These practices developed and continue to evolve through relations with each other and the wider social formation. They were generated through the material arrangements structured by the national and agrarian questions, but also how various class and race actors comprehended and engaged politically with the material arrangements of that relationship, thus taking us to the terrain of ideology, culture and subjectivity. This is particularly evident in the case of the *organic* and *systemic* streams, which have the longer historical record of engaging on food questions with the conditions of Black, marginalised communities, and which have, through different political frames and forms of organising, sought to advance agrarian-centred responses to poverty and hunger.

The *organic* stream, rather than historically originating only in middle-class concerns for healthy and clean food, in fact has a much longer history that emerged from a nexus of African elite and European missionary agency in the early 1900s. This nexus sought to deal with the ecological and nutritional consequences of the evolving agrarian question that was engendering racialised land dispossession and overcrowding in the rural 'native reserves' (Khan, 1994). In these conditions, they promoted sustainable agriculture methods amongst the peasantry that sought to rebuild soil health. However, coming from liberal political orientations, their methods failed to connect with wider peasant mobilisation over the decades. Specifically, they sought to promote what today would be known as organic agriculture as a means to pre-empt the political mobilisation of the peasantry that might have challenged the political sources of soil degradation and poverty (Rich, 1993). Furthermore, in themselves these practices were insufficient to meet the livelihood needs of rural Africans in the face of ongoing processes of marginalisation and dispossession. Reflecting particular political articulations between African elites, missionaries, local ecological conditions, and the soil conservationist discourse circulating across settler colonies in the first half of the twentieth century (see Beinart, 1984), their key protagonists largely promoted these initiatives and farming practices through ideological underpinnings that, to paraphrase Stuart Hall (1996b), reconciled and accommodated their target subjects to their subordinate place in the social formation.

After the rise of apartheid in 1948 and the consolidation of rural Bantustans as places to store labour surplus to the needs of industry and commercial agriculture, organic agricultural livelihood practices continued to evolve in poor rural communities. This included the involvement of liberals intervening to respond to the resultant rural poverty that occurred in relation to the state development apparatus that sought to develop these Bantustans as self-sustaining, semi-independent ethnic homelands. These efforts taking place in rural working-class communities connected with urban, middle-class processes to grow clean and healthy food and sustain soil health (Rosenberg, interview, 2018). The organic movement thus further developed through an articulation between middle class concerns for clean food and healthy soil and the declining material conditions of rural working-class communities, through the conduit of rural development workers. These practices also spread into urban areas as middle-class actors sought to instil 'empowerment' and 'self-

reliance' in Black township communities suffering from hunger and malnutrition as a result of low wages and unemployment (Roux: no date). These practices reflect a political and ideological frame through which they sought to organise hungry, black communities in response to the consequences of particular material arrangements.

The *systemic* sphere has much of its origins in the national liberation movement of the apartheid era. The national liberation movement worked to mobilise racially oppressed communities to contest the contours of the national question and overcome minority rule. However, its historical lacuna was a sustained political connection with the agrarian question in the form of mass rural resistance to state interventions that undermined rural people's autonomy and livelihoods between the 1940s and early 1960s (see Bundy, 1984; Drew, 1996). These rural mobilisations were unable to sustain independent rural organisation due to the challenges posed by the isolated rural geography and a lack of a wider movement infrastructure. So by the 1980s, liberal and left-leaning anti-apartheid NGOs had become the key link between rural communities still experiencing land dispossession and the political and legal sphere (Alexander, 2006).

Initiatives falling in the organic and systemic types continued to evolve as they engaged differently politically with the opportunities and limits of the liberation era after the democratic breakthrough in 1994 – consequent shifts in material arrangements allowed their practices to further evolve in the democratic era, in the context of the adoption of a neoliberal economic framework by the ruling African National Congress (ANC) and the slow pace of land and agrarian reform. For the organic livelihood stream, political liberalisation, greater donor and corporate social responsibility funds, combined with stunted land reform, provided grounds for the expansion of small-scale sustainable agriculture amongst subaltern communities within the prevailing structural constraints (Auerbach, 2017). In this era some organic organisations also sought to diversify their racial and class base, further connecting with working class communities. They simultaneously sought to expand the market opportunities for organic agriculture and enrol this diversity of actors. The *systemic* sphere, however, sought to reconnect political mobilisation of subaltern communities with agrarian and food issues after the ANC state failed to realise transformative programmes around land and agrarian reform and resource re-distribution (Greenberg, 2006). This coincided with connections between organisations in the systemic type, such as Surplus People Project and Trust for Community Outreach and Education, to the global social justice movement, such as through the World Social Forum. Through this such organisations connected with food sovereignty movements and actors, and attempted to translate food sovereignty into the South African context of continued racialised class inequality reflected in its agricultural structure. Sustainable agriculture methods similar to those in the *organic* stream also came to be elaborated, but framed through food sovereignty and connected to attempted popular class organisation to transform the prevailing agrarian structure. Success in the latter regard, however, has been limited, seen in the slow pace of land reform and the failure to realise alternative agricultural productive arrangements (Greenberg, 2015). As a network that sought to increase coordination and movement power with civil society organisations working for agrarian reform, Tshintsha Amakhaya, noted in 2015, this lack of agrarian reform and necessary policy change has reflected weak movement power in relation to the state and market (Tshintsha Amakhaya, 2015).

The food sovereignty discourse and practice (forms of organising, who is organised, and agroecological methods) in South Africa is thus articulated through contingent interconnections between the different streams (convergences) as well as through their political divergences. This brief overview of the historical development of the food movement in relation to popular classes has sought to show how the typology presented in the findings section has developed through historical articulations between class, ecology, and the national and agrarian questions, shaped in not entirely predictable ways by their articulations with varying forms of political agency in relation to the national question.

This suggests that the types constituting the food movement in South Africa can be seen as articulatory practices that are not static or self-contained, but as nodal points reflecting a "'unity' out of difference" (Hall,

1991: 136), that are relational, dynamic and shifting. Key in the South African context is how they have been shaped through differing ideological and political engagements with the country's agrarian question and the evolving relationships between race and the political system. The varied yet also relational forms and politics constituting the food movement in South Africa, and through which food sovereignty is filtered and further articulated, therefore suggests limits to trying to associate food sovereignty agency with a clear or idealised food sovereignty subject, as reflected in some agrarian debates. Given that articulation is also generative of social phenomena (Hall, 1980), a more useful frame of analysis may be how histories and social practices around sustainable food articulate with prevailing class realities, political histories, subjectivities and modes of organising to produce 'the sovereign' of food sovereignty, or the subject, in politically contextual ways. Such processes can therefore also be seen as potentially productive of further political possibilities (Featherstone, 2017).

The latter may include opportunities to build stronger articulations etween initiatives and actors in the different categories of the food movement. For example, while localised practices of sustainable agriculture have tended to reflect instrumental responses to hunger and malnutrition (i.e., less connected to collective action that challenges the social order), they could also contain seeds of alternative social relations and processes of conscientisation necessary to wider transformative social and political action (van der Ploeg et al., 2004; Siebert, 2019; Paganini et al., 2021). The ongoing political relationship between the agrarian question and the national question in South Africa has been an important modality through which these articulations have happened, and may continue to occur.

Conclusion

In the context of the global food sovereignty discourse and movement, this article explored the food movement terrain in South Africa, with which the food sovereignty discourse articulates. It described for the more formal forms of organising around food system questions, while future publications will focus more on the dynamics of such organising at the grassroots/subaltern level. It showed that the food movement in South Africa can be understood as broadly differentiated into *lifestyle*, *organic*, *food justice*, and *systemic* approaches. Key to understanding them is how they emerged from, relate to, and engaged with key features of the South Africa's agrarian and national questions, and today's conditions of a highly unequal agrarian structure, a corporatised food system, and social inequality. However, rather than seeing these types of approaches as clear-cut and self-contained, one can understand them as relational. They sometimes overlap practically, often emerge from similar conditions, and can influence each other through material and social interactions. They have also developed in highly relational terms to key historical processes and material circumstances that have defined South Africa's history, in terms of race, land, class, and ecology. Key in shaping the types has been particular kinds of political agency informed by different ideologies and cultural subjectivities in a racially oppressive society, especially as they relate to the popular classes. They can thus be understood as articulatory practices that emerged out of not entirely predictable articulations between the conditions of national oppression as well as the opportunities and limits of national liberation. In this sense, the national question, and its unresolved nature post-apartheid, has been an important structuring dynamic of the food movement. These factors point to the need for attention to contextual and politically specific analysis regarding the relationship between agrarian change, food sovereignty, and agency, in understanding the variegated nature of food sovereignty movements in particular social contexts, and their political potentials.

This article therefore makes a contribution to thinking about the formation of food movements on historically constructed terrain. The implications for thinking about food movements in the Global South, and in former settler colonies in particular, are to situate them in relation to historical forces related to the national question that they have emerged through. In other words, we must include in our analyses the national class relations and the engagements of food movements with contemporary processes related to globalisation and the world economy (McMichael, 1997). This points us to consider not only the elaboration of the technical

sides of agroecology in examining food sovereignty movements, for example, but to analyse them in integral relation to the forces and relations that they are articulated through, as social practices. The concept of articulation also enables us to think about how such practices are not merely the product of overarching social processes, but also about how they could be productive of alternative social relations and realities that generate new politics and practices beyond the limits of unresolved national questions.

References

Akram-Lodhi AH (2021) The ties that bind? Agroecology and the agrarian question in the twenty-first century. *The Journal of Peasant Studies* 48(4): 687-714.

Alexander A (2006) Rights beyond the urban-rural divide: South Africa's Landless People's Movement and the creation of a landless subject. Report, Centre for Civil Society, University of KwaZulu Natal, South Africa.

Alkon A (2013) Food justice, food sovereignty and the challenge of neoliberalism. *Food Sovereignty: A Critical Dialogue, International Conference,* Yale University, United States, 14-15 September 2013.

Alonso-Fradejas A (2015) Anything but a story foretold: Multiple politics of resistance to the agrarian extractivist project in Guatemala. *The Journal of Peasant Studies* 42(3-4): 489-515.

Battersby J (2013) Urban agriculture and race in South Africa. In R. Slocum and A. Saldanha (eds) *Geographies of Race and Food: Fields, Bodies, Markets*. Ashgate Press: Farnham.

Beinart W (1984) Soil erosion, conservationism and ideas about development: A Southern African exploration, 1900-1960. *Journal of Southern African Studies* 11(1): 52-83.

Bernstein H (1996) Agrarian studies then and now. *Journal of Peasant Studies* 24(1): 22-51.

Bernstein H (2006) Is there an agrarian question in the 21st century? *Canadian Journal of Development Studies* 27(4): 449-460.

Bernstein H (2014) Food sovereignty via the 'peasant way': a skeptical view. *The Journal of Peasant Studies* 41(6): 1031-1063.

Bernstein H (2016) Agrarian political economy and modern world capitalism: the contributions of food regime analysis. *The Journal of Peasant Studies* 43(3): **611-647**.

Borras SM, Edelman M and Kay C (2008) Transnational agrarian movements: Origins and politics, campaign and impact. *Journal of Agrarian Change* 8(2&3): 169-204.

Bundy C. (1984) Land and liberation: The South African national liberation movements and the agrarian question, 1920s-1960s. *Review of African Political Economy* 29: 14-29.

Chatterjee A, Czajka L and Gethin A (2023) Redistribution without inclusion? Inequality in South Africa since the end of apartheid. Unpublished paper.

Cock J (2016) 'Living well' and capitalist modernity. Unpublished paper, Food Symposium, University of Pretoria, July 2016.

Cousins B (2013) Smallholder irrigation schemes, agrarian reform and 'ccumulation from above and from below' in South Africa. *Journal of Agrarian Change* 13(1): 116-139.

Dasgupta A (2021) Peasant production in India: How the 'need economy' facilitates accumulation. *Development and Change* 52(25): 217-240.

Dor L (2017) Yet another major supermarket exploits its workers. *Amandla!*, 4 April. Available at http://aidc.org.za/strikers-challenge-pick-n-pays-questionable-labour-practices/ (accessed 18 December 2020).

Drew A (1996) The theory and practice of the agrarian question in South African socialism, 1928-1960'. In: Bernstein H (ed) *The Agrarian Question in South Africa*. Oxon: Frank Cass & Co. Ltd, pp.53-92.

Edelman MT, Weis A, Baviskar SM, Borras J, Holt-Giménez E, Kandiyoti D and Wolford W (2014) Introduction: Critical perspectives on food sovereignty. *The Journal of Peasant Studies* 41(6): 911-931.

FAO, IFAD, UNICEF, WFP and WHO (2022) *The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2022. Repurposing food and agricultural policies to make healthy diets more affordable*. Rome: FAO.

Featherstone, D. 2017. Stuart Hall and our current conjuncture. *IPR Progressive Review* 24(1): 36-44.

Figueroa M (2015) Food sovereignty in everyday life: Toward a people-centred approach to food systems. *Globalisations* 12(4): 498-512.

Friedman S (2015) *Race, Class and Power: Harold Wolpe and the Radical Critique of Apartheid*. Pietermaritzburg: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press.

Greenberg S (2006) Urban food politics, welfare and resistance: A case study of the southern Johannesburg metro. Grant Report, Centre for Civil Society, University of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa.

Greenberg S (2015) Agrarian reform and South Africa's agro-food system. *The Journal of Peasant Studies* 42(5): 957-979.

Hall S (1980) Race, articulation and societies structured in dominance. In: UNESCO (ed) *Sociological Theories: Race and Colonialism*. Paris: UNESCO, pp. 305-345.

Hall S (1991) 'Postscript: Gramsci and us', in R. Simon (ed.), *Gramsci's Political Thought*. London: Lawrence and Wishart, pp. 129-147.

Hall S (1996a) 'Gramsci's relevance for the study of race and ethnicity', in D. Morley and K-H Cheng (eds.) *Stuart Hall: Critical Dialogues in Cultural Studies*. London and New York: Routledge, pp. 411-441.

Hall S (1996b) 'The problem of ideology: Marxism without guarantees', in D. Morley and K-H Cheng (eds.) *Stuart Hall: Critical Dialogues in Cultural Studies*. London and New York: Routledge, pp. 411-441.

Hendricks F (2014) Class and nation in the agrarian questions of the south: Notes in response to Moyo, Jha and Yeros. *Agrarian South: Journal of Political Economy* 3(20): 275-293.

Hart G (2002) *Disabling Globalisation: Places of Power in Post-Apartheid South Africa*. Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press.

Hodge J et al. (2021) *Measuring Concentration and Participation in the South African Economy: Levels and Trends. Summary Report of Findings and Recommendations*. Report, Competition Commission, South Africa.

Holt-Giménez E and Shattuck A (2011) Food crises, food regimes and food movements: rumblings of reform or tides of transformation? *Journal of Peasant Studies* 38(1): 109-144.

Inyanda National Land Movement (2015) *Inyanda National Land Movement Launch Report 2015*. Cape Town: TCOE.

Jacobs R (2018) An urban proletariat with peasant characteristics: Land occupations and livestock raising in South Africa. *The Journal of Peasant Studies* 45(5-6): 884-903.

Jara M (2013) Critical reflections on the crisis and limits of ANC 'Marxism'. In: Williams M and Satgar V (eds) *Marxisms in the 21st Century: Crisis, Critique and Struggle*. Johannesburg: Wits University Press, pp. 260-280.

Khan F (1994) Rewriting South Africa's conservation history – the role of the Native Farmers Association. *Journal of Southern African Studies* 20(4): 499-516.

Kesselman B (2017) *Sowing the seeds of food sovereignty or cultivating consent? The potential and limitations of Johannesburg's community gardens*. PhD thesis, University of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa.

Ledger T (2016) *An Empty Plate: Why We Are Losing the Battle for Our Food System*. Johannesburg: Jacana.

Levenson Z (2022) Make 'articulation' Gramscian again. In: Chari, S, Hunter M and Samson M (eds) *Ethnographies of Power: Working Radical Concepts with Gillian Hart*. Johannesburg: Wits University Press, pp. 187-216.

McMichael M (1997) Rethinking globalisation: The agrarian question revisited. *Review of International Political Economy* 4(4): pp. 630-662.

McMichael P (2014) Historicizing food sovereignty. *Journal of Peasant Studies* 41(6): pp. 933-957.

McMichael P (2016) Commentary: Food regime for thought. *Journal of Peasant Studies* 43(3): pp. 648-670.

Moyo S, Jha P and Yeros P (2013) The classical agrarian question: Myth, reality and relevance today. *Agrarian South: Journal of Political Economy* 2(1): 93-119.

Murisa T and Helliker, K (2011) Contemporary rural realities in Southern Africa. In: Helliker K and Murisa T (eds) *Land Struggles and Civil Society in Southern Africa*. Trenton: Africa World Press.

PACSA (Pietermaritzburg Agency for Community Social Agency) (2017) PACSA Monthly Food Price Barometer: July 2017. Report, Pietermaritzburg, South Africa.

Paganini N et al (2021) Agency in South Africa's food systems: A food justice perspective of food security in the Cape Flats and St. Helena Bay during the COVID-19 pandemic. *SLE Publication Series – S285*. Berlin: Centre for Rural Development (SLE).

Patel R (2010) What does food sovereignty look like? In: Wittman H, Desmarais A and Wiebe N (eds) *Food Sovereignty: Reconnecting Food, Nature and Community*. Halifax and Winnipeg: Fernwood.

Rich PB (1993) Bernard Huss and the experiment in African cooperatives in South Africa, 1926-1948. *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* 26(2): 297-317.

Robson C and McCartan K (2016) *Real World Research (4th Edition)*. Chichester: John Wiley and Sons.

Shatzki TR (2010) Materiality and social life. *Nature and Culture* 5(2): 123-149.

Siebert A (2019) Transforming urban food systems in South Africa: unfolding food sovereignty in the city. *The Journal of Peasant Studies* 47(2): 401–419.

Simelane T, Mutanga S, Hongoro C, Parker W, Mjimba V, Zuma K, Kajombo R, Ngidi M, Masamha B, Mokhele T, Managa R, Ngungu M, Sinyolo S, Tshililo F, Ubisi N, Skhosana Ndinda C, Sithole M, Muthige M, Lunga W, Tshitangano F, Dukhi N F, Sewpaul R, Mkhongi A, Marinda E (2023) *National Food and Nutrition Security Survey: National Report*. Pretoria: Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC).

Tarrow S (1993) Cycles of collective action: Between moments of madness and the repertoire of contention *Social Science History* 17 (20): 281-307.

TCOE (Trust for Community Outreach and Education) (2016) *Farm Workers Speak: Hope, Heroism, Determination*. Cape Town: TCOE.

Tilly C and S Tarrow (2015) *Contentious Politics (2nd Edition)*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Tshintsha Amakhaya (2015) *Launch of Phase 2*. Cape Town: Tshintsha Amakhaya.

van der Ploeg JD, Bouma J, Rip A, Rijkenberg FHJ, Ventura F and Wiskerke JSC (2004) On regines, novelties, niches and co-production. In Wiskerke JSC and van der Ploeg JD (eds) *Seeds of Transition: Essays on Novelty Production, Niches and Regimes in Agriculture*. Assen: Koninklijke Van Gorcum.

VoC (Voice of the Cape) News (2019) 'Modern day slavery': Over 200 workers in in labour dispute take Pick n Pay and labour brokers to CCMA. 27 November. Available at: https://www.vocfm.co.za/modern-day-slavery-over-200-workers-in-labour-dispute-take-pick-n-pay-and-labour-brokers-to-ccma/ (accessed 18 November 2020).

Voss K and M Williams (2012) The local in the global: Re-thinking social movements in the new millennium. *Democratisation* 19(2): 352-377.

Wilderman J (2015) From Flexible Work to Mass Uprising: The Western Cape Farm Workers' Struggle. *Working Paper No. 4*. Johannesburg: Society, Work and Development Institute (SWOP).

Williams M (2014) The solidarity economy and social transformation. In: Satgar V (ed) *The Solidarity Economy Alternative: Emerging Theory and Practice*. Pietermaritzburg: University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN) Press, pp. 37-63.

Wolpe H (1972) Capitalism and cheap labour power in South Africa: From segregation to apartheid. *Society and Economy* 4: 425-456.

World Bank (2022) *Inequality in Southern Africa: An Assessment of the Southern African Customs Union*. Washington: The World Bank.

Zentgraf L L and T Kalix Garcia (2024) Food movements, resistance, and new digital repertoires in (post-)pandemic times *International Journal of the Sociology of Agriculture and Food* 29(2): 105-128.

Volume 30 | Issue 1 | April 2024

From coalitions to social movements: Lessons from civic food coalition formation in Australia
Camille Freeman and Kiah Smith

Local food systems and community development: a symbiotic relation?
Hege Westkog, Mette Talseth Solnørdal, Mikkel Vindegg, Anders Tønnesen, Thea Sandnes, Bård Sødal Grasbekk, Ingrid Christensen

THE FOOD SYSTEM IN THE (POST-)PANDEMIC WORLD

The Food System in the (Post-)Pandemic World: Disruptions, Vulnerability, Resilience, and Alternatives - 2
Hilde Bjørkhaug, Atakan Büke, José Duarte Ribeiro, Sarah Ruth Sippel
Blame Covid-19 and Ignore the Long History of Industrial Standardisation in Agriculture
Yildiz Atasoy
Exceptional policies for exceptional situations? How COVID-19 revealed persisting precarity for seasonal migrant workers
Hilde Bjørkhaug and Jostein Brobakk
The State of Indigenous Foods in Africa: The case of Mankon Community in the Northwest Region of Cameroon
Sheila Ngoh Manka and Mokong Simon Mapadimeng
Opportunities and limitations of grassroots associations' food practices at the intersection of the rural and urban in Ankara
Valerio Colosio and Esra Demirkol Colosio
What is left after the pandemic? Solidarity and Reciprocity amongst Kayambi agroecological producers during COVID-19
Larissa da Silva Araujo

EMERGING AFRICAN SCHOLARS OF AGRICULTURE AND FOOD

Advancing early-career agri-food researchers publishing opportunities in Sub Saharan Africa
Fridah Mbuchi-Kut, Allison Loconto and Sheila Ngoh Manka
The challenges and contexts of the Lokaleng School Feeding Scheme in the North West Province, South Africa
Bongi Bianca Mkhombo, Sheila Ngoh Manka, and Kiran Odhav
Food Movements Unite! ? Food sovereignty, the agrarian question, and the contours of organising from below in the South African food system
Andrew Bennie